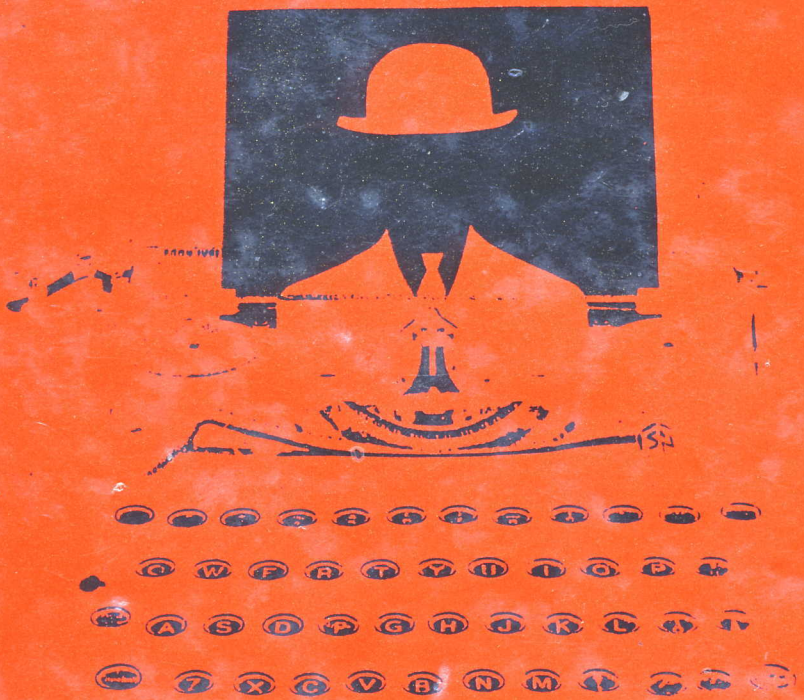
THE SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE

Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingewood



PALADIN

Part One:
Theory
by Alan Swingewood

1 Introduction: Sociology and Literature

I

For the literary critic literature is seen as a largely self-enclosed, self-sustaining enterprise. Works of literature must be approached primarily in terms of their own inner structure, imagery, metaphor, rhythm, delineation of character, dynamics of plot, and so on. Only occasionally is the external society allowed to intrude and then merely descriptively, as a necessary background. The modern literary critic, absorbed as he is in wholly textual criticism, in the intrinsic qualities of literature, would almost certainly be hostile to any claim that his subject could be illuminated by an approach which would be largely extrinsic. To suggest that sociology (defining it for the moment as one example of the extrinsic approach) would not merely cast light on certain literary problems, but that without it there could not be a complete understanding of literature – such a view would be rejected, and with feeling. After all, as the literary critic would doubtless point out, the study of literature and the study of society imply wholly different methods and orientations. What possible bridge can there be between the worlds of imagination and science?

These objections should not deter the prospective literary sociologist. At the most basic level, that of content, sociology and literature share a similar conspectus. Sociology is essentially the scientific, objective study of man in society, the study of social institutions and of social processes; it seeks to answer the question of how society is possible, how it works, why it persists. Through a rigorous examination of the social institutions, religious, economic, political, and familial, which together constitute what is called social structure, a picture emerges, not

always clearly, of the ways in which man adapts himself is conditioned by particular societies; of the mechanisms of 'socialization', the process of cultural learning, whereby individuals are allocated to and accept their respective roles in the social structure.* This aspect of sociology is related to the concept of social stability, of continuity within different societies, the ways in which individuals come to accept the major social institutions as both necessary and right. But, of course, sociology is concerned also with the processes whereby society changes, gradually, or cataclysmically as in revolution, from one type of society to another – from feudalism to capitalism for example – and the effects which these changes have on social structure. Social processes also refer to small-scale internal change: the means, for example, whereby social and political authority are 'legitimized', that is, come to be accepted as right by the majority of the population; the ways in which conflict between classes, between groups, or simply between individuals is either successfully or unsuccessfully regulated by social institutions, allowing some form of consensus to be achieved.

As with sociology, literature too is pre-eminently concerned with man's social world, his adaptation to it, and his desire to change it. Thus the novel, as the major literary genre of industrial society, can be seen as a faithful attempt to re-create the social world of man's relation with his family, with politics, with the State; it delineates too his roles within the family and other institutions, the conflicts and tensions between groups and social classes. In the purely documentary sense, one can see the novel as dealing with much the same social, economic, and political textures as sociology. But of course it achieves more than this; as art, literature transcends mere description and objective scientific analysis, penetrating the surfaces of social life, showing the ways in which men and women experience

* The psychological approach to literature rarely employs these sociological concepts, being more concerned to relate literary creativity to specific psychological conditions. It is frequently reductionist in that the literary text is seen as merely a reflection of the author's psychological history, as a peculiar *individual* phenomenon. This is not to deny that certain events in the socialization of writers, such as Dickens's experience of the blacking factory, will express themselves in a writer's work, through his choice of characters, plots, use of symbols, metaphor, etc., but this in no sense supplants explanation and understanding of literature in terms of social structure and, as we suggest later, of values.

society as feeling. 'Without the full literary witness,' writes Richard Hoggart, 'the student of society will be blind to the fullness of a society.'*

Although, then, it would seem that literature and sociology are not wholly distinct disciplines but, on the contrary, complement each other in our understanding of society, historically they have tended to remain apart. Early sociologists, such as Comte and Spencer in the nineteenth century and Durkheim and Weber in the twentieth, while making the occasional reference to imaginative literature, on the whole subordinated it to the study of social structure. The sociological study of literature is thus a fairly late arrival, for although there are today well developed sociologies of religion, education, politics, social change, even of such an imprecise area as ideology, there is virtually no established corpus of knowledge called the sociology of literature. It is also unfortunate that the small amount of knowledge and research which does exist is on the whole exceedingly dubious in quality, lacking in scientific rigour, banal in the quality of its sociological 'insights', and frequently consisting of the crudest correlations between literary texts and social history.†

At the present time it is possible to characterize two broad approaches to a sociology of literature. The most popular perspective adopts the documentary aspect of literature, arguing that it provides a mirror to the age. This mirror image approach has a long and distinguished history: the French philosopher Louis de Bonald (1754–1840) was one of the first writers to argue that through a careful reading of any nation's literature 'one could tell what this people had been', while Stendhal, in a celebrated passage in *Le Rouge et le Noir*, wrote of the novel as a 'mirror journeying down the high road', sometimes reflecting 'the azure blue of heaven, sometimes the mire in the puddles'. On this view literature is a direct reflection of various facets of social structure, family relationships, class conflict, and possibly divorce trends and population composition.‡ As one of the

* R. Hoggart, 'Literature and Society', in *A Guide to the Social Sciences*, ed. N. Mackenzie, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966.
† For this conception of a literary sociology, see G. Watson, *The Study Literature*, London, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1969, ch. 10, 'Sociology'.
‡ Cf. M. C. Albrecht, 'The Relationship of Literature and Society', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 159, pp. 425–36.

more distinguished writers in the sociology of literature has well expressed it: 'It is the task of the sociologist of literature to relate the experience of the writer's imaginary characters and situations to the historical climate from which they derive. He has to transform the private equation of themes and stylistic means into social equations.'*

This 'transforming' of the private world of literature to specific social meanings, the extrinsic approach to literature, has frequently come under severe criticism. It is argued against it, for example, that the method tends to use literature solely as a quarry of information to be sociologically 'ransacked'; that literature is being 'turned over from the outside' by those lacking the necessary critical apparatus for understanding and evaluation.† Implicit too in this method is the danger that the literary sociologist might not have sufficient skill to unravel the historical details of particular periods. After all, since the literary document has to be analysed in terms of the world it supposedly represents, then 'only a person who has knowledge of the structure of a society from other sources than purely literary ones is able to find out if, and how far, certain social types and their behaviour are reproduced in a novel in an adequate or inadequate manner'.‡ But the real problem arises over the question of what literature actually reflects. If the novel, for example, is the mirror of an age, then this raises the question of whether or not purely literary devices may distort this portrayal; too often in the past an artistic fidelity to historical and social truth has been assumed, with wholly disastrous interpretative consequences.§ There is, too, the question of generalization: to what extent are the fictional characters and situations typical of a specific historical period? Can any useful sociological generalizations be drawn – for example, from the novels of Charles Dickens and Mrs Gaskell – on such social issues as

* L. Lowenthal, *Literature and the Image of Man*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1957, p. x.
† Hoggart, op. cit.; F. R. Leavis, 'Sociology and Literature', in *The Common Pursuit*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1952.
‡ E. K. Bramsted, *Aristocracy and the Middle Classes in Germany, Social Types in German Literature, 1830–1900*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1964, p. 4.
§ Thus Taine (see chapter 2 below), in his study of English literature (1864), forgot that in the Elizabethan theatre feminine roles were played by boys and thus argued for the essential masculinity of Elizabethan heroes and types.

nineteenth-century management–labour relations, the role of trade unions or working-class consciousness? What useful sociological material is there in the Victorian novelist's conception of the English working class, which is not far more accurately conveyed from a close reading of contemporary journals, factory reports, government inquiries, crude health, and mortality statistics? And these latter sources are free to a very great extent from the Victorian novelists' middle-class perspectives and ideology.

The conception of the mirror, then, must be treated with great care in the sociological analysis of literature. Above all else, of course, it ignores the writer himself, his awareness and intention. Great writers do not set out simply to depict the social world in largely descriptive terms; it might be suggested that the writer by definition has a more critical task, of setting his characters in motion within artificially contrived situations to seek their own private 'destiny', to discover values and meaning in the social world. For society is more than an ensemble of social institutions that make up social structure: it contains both norms, the standards of behaviour which individuals come to accept as right ways of acting and judging, as well as values which are consciously formulated and which people strive to realize socially. Literature clearly reflects norms, attitudes to sex by the working class and middle class, for example; it reflects, too, values in the sense of the writer's own intention, and it might be suggested that it is on the level of values where literature is seen to reinforce and illuminate purely sociological material. This is particularly noticeable in literature which chooses itself as subject. Thus although both Balzac in *Lost Illusions* and George Gissing in *New Grub Street* (1891) provide a fairly accurate picture of the increasing commercialization of literature during the nineteenth century, the novelists' real aim lies more properly within the realm of values. The essential theme of both novels is the conflict between the genuine literary consciousness of poet and novelist on the one hand and the practical, wholly calculative and mercenary dictates of the industrialized literary market on the other – the tension between literature as art and literature as trade. Both Balzac and Gissing are using specific historical features of the nineteenth century as the background for their main theme: the devaluation of values, the sacrifice of

the artist on the altar of profit. It could be argued, then, that the 'true' meaning of great literature and the social groups involved in its production lies precisely in the quest and the struggle of both for 'authentic values', the values of a genuine human community in which human needs, aspirations, and desires are mediated through social interaction. If this is so, and it will be defended later in the book, then the task of the sociologist is not simply to discover historical and social reflection (or refraction) in works of literature, but to articulate the nature of the values embedded within particular literary works, what Raymond Williams has called 'the structure of feeling'.* Thus Lowenthal has suggested that the main purpose of any viable sociology of literature must be to discover the 'core of meaning' which one finds at the heart of different works of literature and which expresses many aspects of thought and feeling on subjects as varied as social class, work, love, religion, nature, and art. In his own work Lowenthal shows how Cervantes' hero Don Quixote can be understood sociologically as a structure of sentiments and behaviour indicative of 'extreme personal insecurity' which ranges from fears of starvation and loss of social status to philosophical uncertainty. Such sentiments, he argues, can be seen as a direct result of the rapid increase in social mobility which followed the decline of Spanish feudalism with its stress on fixed social position, and the development of a much more fluid and open commercial society in which social status depended more on achievement than on ascription. Don Quixote is thus seen as an essentially isolated individual dominated by an apprehensive rather than optimistic view of the world.† For Lowenthal, this kind of analysis will succeed in revealing the 'central problems with which man has been concerned at various times, permitting us to develop an image of a given society in terms of the individuals who composed it'. We learn both of the nature of society and the ways individuals experienced it, through the fictional characters who see and record 'not only the reality around them, but their hopes, wishes, dreams and fantasies . . .'. The social meanings of this inner life of characters, Lowenthal concludes, are related to problems of social change. Thus literature, as a reflection of

* R. Williams, *Culture and Society*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1958.
† Lowenthal, op. cit.

values and of feeling, points both to the degree of change occurring in different societies as well as to the manner in which individuals become socialized into the social structure and their response to this experience. Literature, because it delineates man's anxieties, hopes, and aspirations, is perhaps one of the most effective sociological barometers of the human response to social forces. It has to be said, however, that while literature will reflect social values and feelings in the way that Lowenthal has argued, it is highly probable that as society grows more complex in its modes of socialization, change, and social structure, it will become increasingly difficult to analyse literature solely in terms of reflection. In the eighteenth century it was still possible for Fielding in *Tom Jones* to portray a whole society, a totality, in terms of its values and feelings through his rich gallery of characters; as, indeed, had Homer living in a more homogeneous and smaller society. But with the beginnings of industrialization and the development of a complex social structure involving a multiplicity of class and status positions, together with the growth of mass communications and the so-called mass society, 'no one could possibly attempt anything along the same lines . . . if only because no single individual can have personal knowledge of more than a minute fraction of it'.* If the novel, whose rise parallels the emergence of industrial society, reflects social structure, then it has done so in portraying the problems of *society in general* in terms of a restricted milieu which functions as a social microcosm: Balzac's nobles, bourgeoisie, and artists, Proust's decaying aristocracy, Aldous Huxley's upper-class intellectuals, reflect the particular historical crisis of society in general.

The second approach to a literary sociology moves away from the emphasis on the work of literature itself to the production side, and especially to the social situation of the writer. A leading authority in this field, the French sociologist Robert Escarpit, has tended to concentrate exclusively on this aspect.† Patronage and the costs of production replace the literary text as the centre of discussion. Thus the writer's relationship with his patron,

* I. Watt, 'Literature and Society', in *The Arts in Society*, ed. R. N. Wilson, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1964.

† R. Escarpit, *Sociologie de la Littérature*, Paris, 1958. Cf. R. Williams, *The Long Revolution*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1961, part 2.

often oblique and unsavoury, is traced in some detail, from the patronage of the medieval courts to that of the eighteenth-century aristocracy. With the rise of cheap publishing and a mass market the patronage system gives way to the autocracy of the publisher and booksellers. The growth, too, of a specifically middle-class audience in the late eighteenth century helped to shift the writer's position from one of dependence to one of profession. This gradual democratization of culture, as the German sociologist Karl Mannheim has called it, is especially significant for the rise of the novel, a pre-eminently middle-class literary genre, and the emergence of modern 'sensibility' or modern psychology. The cultural triumph of the middle classes can be seen as foreshadowing mass culture and the virtual commercialization of literature. The writer's position in a mass society is extremely important as a contrast to his earlier social situation, and clearly likely to affect his creative potential in many ways; the links between this historical background and the development of literature constitute a key area in any literary sociology. It involves a major problem, namely the precise linkage between the text and its background – how do literary production and consumption affect the form and the content of particular literary works? It must be noted, however, that although this approach is essential for any thorough understanding of literature, as crucial support for textual analysis, great care has to be exercised in order to avoid the extremely crude forms of reductionism so obviously inherent in it. The work of literature must never become a mere epiphenomenon of its surrounding environment.

A persistent theme of this particular sociological approach is the emphasis on the increasing alienation of the writer from his society and the consequent impact on literary style and content. This social fragmentation has frequently been traced to the decline of patronage in the late eighteenth century and the writer's emergence as a member of a 'free floating intelligentsia'.* In pre-industrial society, it is argued, a relative harmony existed between the author and his audience; in Periclean Athens, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were more or less inte-

* This is a well-worn cliché of modern sociology. It can be traced to John Stuart Mill, but its more recent use derives from Karl Mannheim. See especially his *Ideology and Utopia* (1936).

grated into society and not regarded as members of a separate class. In Augustan Rome, on the other hand, the glorification of the regime by Horace and Virgil can be seen as a direct result of the system of patronage.* With the decline of Rome and Athens courtly patronage became the writer's main support, for example, in Renaissance Italy and in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France; patronage of the court was then frequently followed by that of the rich, with needy authors vying with each other for food and money.† Patronage and the limited audience of pre-industrial and early commercial society clearly conditioned the writer's response: there existed between the author and his audience a congruence of values, of mutual understanding. But with the rise of a specifically middle-class reading public, lending libraries, and cheap publishing, writers were forced more and more to depend on the system of royalties for their living: literature, as already observed, turned into a trade. For the genuine creative writer the late nineteenth and early years of the twentieth century completed his alienation from society and strengthened his identification with largely intellectual groups. The point which divides the period when it was still possible for the writer to identify with the middle class and express its values through literature, pre-eminently social and rational, from the period of doubt and uncertainty with its emphasis on the psychological and subjectivist state, has often been cited as the year of revolutions – 1848 – when Europe was convulsed with conflict. After this date, in most Western European countries the middle class had either attained political power or were in the process of doing so. The creative writer, with his critical function turned in now on the class from which he usually derived both his paternity and income, becomes 'problematic'.‡

These, then, are two of the major orientations to the sociological study of literature, the one buttressing the other in terms

* It has been suggested that pastoral poetry reflects the 'taste for a fashionable kind of escape which arose in the latter days of Greece and Rome among certain urban and leisured audiences' (Watt, op. cit.).

† Bramsted tells of one nineteenth-century German prince who was in the habit of dispensing a somewhat rustic patronage to his authors, namely produce from his farms, ducks, geese, eggs, etc., which the needy writer could sell or consume depending on his needs (Bramsted, op. cit.).

‡ Cf. A. Hauser, *A Social History of Art*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961, vol. 4, ch. 1. See also below, chapter 3 (I).

of total understanding. But, as with many subjects, a pernicious division of labour has tended to separate them so that research either concentrates on the social context of writing or on the literary text and its social meanings. Those sociologists whose starting point is the text frequently regard the social prerequisites of writing as largely irrelevant for a literary sociology. Thus Lucien Goldmann has argued that in the case of great writers (and for him these are the only writers worthy of study) the purely sociological conditions of writing are surmounted and transcended so that the meanings within the texts are unrelated to the market conditions of authorship. He suggests that second-rate writers can be defined precisely as those who do not succeed in freeing themselves from the dictates of the social-economic context, so that sociological conditions penetrate their work, dominating its structure and content and giving it a purely temporal significance. Goldmann's point is contentious: most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors wrote for a specific audience, creating character and incident that would conform with its values, especially the attitudes towards sex. In both Dickens and Balzac the structure of the novels hinges on the requirements of serial publication, and Balzac's peculiarly dramatic elements (criminal characters, sudden and violent dénouements) are obviously connected to the development of French magazine-publishing in the 1830s and the 1840s. Goldmann's point is probably more apposite in the case of modern literature. Great writers no longer publish in serial form, this being mainly the prerogative of the second-rate and pulp writers. More significantly, it has now become exceedingly difficult to connect the audience, publisher, social group nexus with great literature in any meaningful way. Is it at all possible, for example, to connect sociologically Virginia Woolf's stream of consciousness writing technique with the general social conditions of authorship prevailing in the early twentieth century? Is it not rather a question, as Goldmann insists, of tracing through the linkages between the writer's social group affiliations and connecting both their structure and values with the literary texts? The publisher–author–audience relationship is thus, on this view at least, no longer sociologically determinate.

While the study of literature as a form of social reflection as well as its study in terms of the social context of authorship constitute the two major modes of study, they by no means exhaust the sociological approach. A third perspective, one demanding a high level of skills, attempts to trace the ways in which a work of literature is actually received by a particular society at a specific historical moment. Thus Guy de Maupassant's literary reception in England during the 1880s and the 1890s helped to effect the transition from an English literature penetrated by a naïve or oblique sexuality to one distinctly modern in outlook. In the novels of Thomas Hardy and George Moore, for example, sex is treated more directly than in the novels of Dickens and George Eliot, and this change serves to illustrate the conflict of values, in late Victorian England, between the traditional literary practitioners and the innovators.* Lowenthal has shown how in Germany between 1880 and 1920 the middle and upper classes successfully assimilated Doestoevsky into their own peculiar ideology. The dominant theme in German literary criticism, Lowenthal's main source, in this period was an emphasis on Dostoevsky's irrationalism, which Lowenthal suggests is connected with the rapid contemporary growth of big business and a fully capitalist society.† 'If giant economic and political structures were to be accepted by the people, the ideal of competition among men through the development of reason and will had to be replaced by a veneration of non-rational ideals removed from the forum of critical verification.' To the German critics Dostoevsky appeared as anti-intellectual, mystical, otherworldly, and implacably hostile to the ideas of socialism; his novels could be used as 'intellectual weapons against efforts to reorganize society' such as those proposed by German socialism. This reception of Dostoevsky, Lowenthal suggests, illustrates the profound crisis of consciousness which afflicted the German nation during these forty years and which was to

* B. Slote, *Literature and Society*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1964.

† Lowenthal's method of research was to read 'nearly all' the books, magazine articles, and major newspaper articles written on Dostoevsky during the forty years after 1880 (L. Lowenthal, *The Reception of Dostoevsky's Work in Germany, 1880–1920*, in Wilson, op. cit.).

culminate in the extreme irrationalism, anti-intellectualism, and anti-socialism of the Nazis.

Lowenthal's choice of Dostoevsky points to a problem we have not yet really touched upon: the choice of writer for study and analysis. It is interesting to note that on this point most sociologists of literature and literary critics are agreed: one studies great writers and their texts precisely because their greatness implies deep insights into the human and the social condition. Thus for Leo Lowenthal, the artist 'portrays what is more real than reality itself', while for Richard Hoggart, great literature penetrates more deeply into human experience because it has the capacity 'to see not only individual instances but deeper and more long-term movements below the surface detail' and the ability 'to unite dissimilars, to reveal a pattern out of a mass and a mess, like a magnet placed into iron filings'.* The great artist portrays 'the whole man in depth'.†

The problem of choice cannot be resolved here but it clearly involves the question of criteria; and the specific criterion seems here to be simply that of persistence, that great literature *survives*. If this is so it brings into doubt the nature of any sociology of mass culture, popular culture, and so on, which, on this view, does not have a message for posterity or contain deep insights into man's social and human condition. But if the basic purpose of sociology is to understand the nature and the workings of all societies and men's position within them, then popular culture must surely claim a reasonable status. If the argument of Lowenthal is accepted, that literature embraces the fundamental values and symbols which provide cohesion to the different groups within society, then popular culture could be used as a 'diagnostic tool' for analysing modern man, especially since it has become so widely produced and assimilated.‡

In the chapters which follow we shall attempt to provide evidence of the mutual needs of both sociology and literature, and to suggest that no student of human society can ignore the 'literary witness' and the literary consciousness.

* Hoggart, op. cit.

† Lowenthal, *Literature and the Image of Man*. Cf. F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1948.

‡ Lowenthal, *Literature, Popular Culture and Society*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1961. See also B. Barber and D. M. White, *Mass Culture*, New York, Macmillan, 1957.

2 The Social Theories of Literature

Like many areas of sociology, the sociology of literature has a distinguished as well as uncertain history. It is fashionable nowadays to treat the history of any discipline, especially if it reaches back beyond the nineteenth century, as a somewhat irrelevant and unrewarding academic exercise, a mere display of erudition, unrelated to the immediate problems. Too often the history of ideas has tended to conform to this indictment, that it is no more than 'interesting', possibly even 'stimulating', but nevertheless a scholarly luxury. It is, of course, more than this: the study of the past as theory, as speculation, can tell us not only of the ways in which early predecessors struggled with the same kinds of problems that face the modern researcher but, more particularly, it can clarify the methods used: social science cannot possibly be understood solely in terms of what it does today, and any theory of literature and society can be shown to have a lineage which continues to exercise an influence on present work. We shall argue that the history of the sociology of literature has, at different times and in different writers, posed precisely the major questions of its subject, and that the various responses can be seen to be as much the result of ideology as of scientific immaturity.

1

The first really systematic treatment of the relationship between literature and society belongs to the French philosopher and critic, Hippolyte Taine (1828–93). He was not the first, of course, to grasp the social implications of the imaginative arts: Plato's conception of imitation implies a view of literature as a reflection of society. But prior to Taine the social analysis of literature was in the main sociologically thin in content, lacking

in scientific rigour. Indeed, up to the beginning of the seventeenth century, literature had rarely been thought of in material terms and it was not until the collapse of the medieval world with its static social structures and all-pervasive religious values that men became really aware of society and its institutions as secular forces. The view that literature was socially conditioned, a 'conventional wisdom' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries implied both a chain of historical and social causation as well as a developed critical awareness. The seventeenth-century debate in England and France over the respective merits of the Ancients and the Moderns, the question whether contemporary European literature was comparable with that of Greece and Rome, serves to illustrate the increasing critical and comparative perspective.* The chief discovery of the debate, that epic poetry fitted a particular type of society, 'rude' rather than 'polished', clearly shifted attention to environment as an important causative agent. Seventeenth-century writers conceived environment as a complex of certain physical factors, especially climate and geography, plus the more or less ambiguous notions of 'national character' and 'liberty'. These fragile correlations received relatively little development during the course of the next century, writers for the most part being content to state the truly absurd and the obvious, while others forged the most ingenious connections. The chief factor was usually climate, its extremes conducive to the development of a 'national temper' which in turn produced social and political institutions that could either favour or retard literature, institutions embodying peace or war, liberty or despotism.†

* The discussion in the first part of this chapter is greatly indebted to R. Wellek's *The Rise of English Literary History*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1941, especially chs 2 and 3. It has also drawn on the same author's *A History of Modern Criticism*, Vol. 1, *The Later Eighteenth Century*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1955. W. K. Wimsatt and C. Brooks, *Literary Criticism*, New York, Knopf, 1957, was also helpful.

† Thus William Temple in his *Of Poetry* (1690) argued that English comedy's superiority over others was due to 'the native plenty of our soil, the unequalness of our climate, as well as the ease of our government, and the liberty of professing opinions and factions – plenty begets wantonness and pride; wantonness is apt to invent and pride scorns to imitate. Liberty begets stomach and heart, and stomach will not be constrained. Thus we have more originals, and more that appear that they are: we have more humour, because every man follows his own and takes a pleasure, perhaps a pride, to show it.' Quoted in Wellek, *Rise of English Literary History*, p. 32.

Seventeenth-century writers did grasp, however, the documentary value of literature. In 1699 a certain James Wright declared that 'old plays will always be read by the curious if it were only to discover the manners and behaviour of several ages and how they altered. For plays are exactly like portraits drawn in the garb and fashion of the time when painted'.* This perspective is strongly echoed in one of the first genuine works of social science, Vico's *New Science* (1725). Vico grasped clearly the social aspects of the world and of history, that the social world was largely the work of man, not of divine providence, and that therefore its institutions as well as its art could be analysed in material terms.† Vico related the *Iliad* of Homer to the north-east of Greece, since it describes the Trojan Wars and the period when 'Greece was young and consequently burning with sublime passions such as pride, anger, and vengeance'. The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, was written by Homer much later, and in the south-east, since it 'celebrates Ulysses, who reigned there', during a period when the passions 'were already somewhat cooled by reflection'.‡ The so-called 'mechanical materialism' of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – mechanical in the sense that it implied a simple one-to-one relation between culture and the material basis of society, and thus underrated the active function of human consciousness, that change is above all social and that it is men who change the world – although emphasizing the effects of climate and national character on the development of literature increasingly gave more weight to geographical factors.§ In the writings of Herder (1744–1803) and Madame de Staël (1766–1817), this strong empirical, anti-metaphysical strain was brought to its logical summation.

* Quoted in Wellek, op. cit., p. 33.

† This became a common postulate of eighteenth-century writers, and is most marked in B. Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees* (1714) and Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws* (1748), both early examples of proto-sociology.

‡ Vico, *The New Science*, trans. from the third edition (1744) by T. G. Bergin and M. H. Fisch, New York, Cornell University Press, 1948, Book III. For a discussion of Vico's theory of literature, see E. Wilson, 'The Historical Interpretation of Literature', in *The Triple Thinkers*, London, Penguin Books, 1962.

§ Thus the Abbé du Bos, in his *Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting* (1719), a widely popular and critically acclaimed work, reduced artistic genius to a mere matter of physical environment and physiology. See Wellek, *The Later Eighteenth Century*, pp. 32–3.

Herder, in opposition to the *a priori* aesthetics of his fellow German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, who [illegible] sense of beauty could result only from a purely '[illegible] judgement', proposed a wholly empirical aesthetic based on natural science, history, and psychology. Herder argued that each work of literature was rooted in a certain social and geographical environment where it performed specific functions, and that there was no need for any judgement of value: everything is as it had to be. Literary history is thus cultural history, and for Herder the main question, which he continually poses, is why certain literatures develop in particular areas and why they sometimes decline to establish themselves elsewhere.* His explanations are disappointing, for although employing factors such as variable climate, landscape, race, customs, and political conditions, they rarely move beyond the vague generalities of earlier writers and the exact relationship between literature and social structure is hardly grasped; literature is analysed with reference to history and then used as a means of understanding history. Herder, in fact, is even loath to use his own professed method: instead of the concepts of race, climate, and concrete social conditions he frequently generalizes from the generic and sociologically meaningless terms 'spirit of the time', 'spirit of the nation', the implication being that literature bears a direct causal connection to these dubious concepts.†

Like Herder, Madame de Staël relates literature to climate, geography and social institutions in a generally muddled manner. She opens her book on literature and society with the claim that her purpose is no less than an examination of 'the influence upon literature of religion, custom and law', since 'the

* René Wellek has produced an impressive list of eighteenth-century writers who made genuine attempts to grasp the social foundations of literature. The French author, Marmontel, for example, in his *Poétique Français* (1763), attempted to consider 'poetry as a plant and discover why, indigenous in certain climates it rises and flowers as of itself; why in other climates it flourishes only by cultivation; and in others cannot be made to bloom in spite of all efforts; and why even in the same climate it has sometimes flowered and borne fruit and sometimes withered'. Quoted in Wellek, op. cit., pp. 65–6. Like many others, however, Marmontel singularly failed to realize his project.

† J. C. Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy of Man*, trans. T. Churchill, London, 1800. On Herder, see Wellek, *The Later Eighteenth Century*, ch. 9; R. T. Clark, *Herder – His Life and Thought*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1955; J. K. Fugate, *The Psychological Basis of Herder's Aesthetics*, The Hague, Mouton, 1966.

social and political influences that affect the nature of literature have not been frequently analysed'.* But her intentions are rarely realized and her work contains few valid sociological insights. Her conception of literature is somewhat broad: 'everything that involves the exercise of thought in writing, the physical sciences excepted'. Both metaphysics and fiction are then related to a varied number of factors, especially climatic conditions, which are seen to demarcate quite neatly the literatures of the South and the North. 'Melancholy,' she writes, 'that fertile sentiment in works of genius, seems to belong almost exclusively to Northern climates.' Northern nations are 'dark and moody', with an independence of mind and an indifference to life made possible only by the 'harshness of the soil and the gloom of the sky', and their literature is dominated by a 'passionate sadness' that comes from living in a 'foggy climate'. Southern literature, on the other hand, is characterized by 'coolness, dense woods and limpid streams', with its descriptions of love combining with the 'benevolent shade that protects them from the burning heat of the sun'. Not that climate is all-pervasive. National character, which, she argues, is a result of a complex interaction between religious, legal, and political institutions, is equally important. The Italians, for example, do not write novels because they are too 'licentious' and have little respect for women. Madame de Staël has an interesting observation here, arguing that the novel form could develop only in those societies where women's status was fairly high and where a strong interest in the private life existed. Women, after all, she adds, know nothing of life 'but the capacity to love,' and although England has a poetry full of 'gloomy imagination' it is the country 'where women are most truly loved'.†

Here at least there is a positive step forward in the social interpretation of literature. An awareness of the role of women in creating the novel as a literary genre represents a significant advance on the simplistic correlations of her predecessors and is

* Madame de Staël, *De La Littérature* (1800), Paris, Minard, 1959, vol. 1, p. 3.

† Cf. I. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, London, Penguin Books, 1963, who acknowledges Madame de Staël's anticipation of many elements of his analysis of the growth of the eighteenth-century novel. See especially ch. 2.

truly *social*. Madame de Staël grasps, too, the importance of a strong middle class for the growth of literature, arguing that it produces liberty and virtue, two important prerequisites of art. 'Happy the country,' she writes, 'where the writers are gloomy, the merchants satisfied, the rich melancholy, and the masses content.' But overall her work suffers from the constant invocation of direct causality: too often she states that literature is the expression of the national character which seems to mean simply the 'spirit of the time'.*

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, then, the social analysis of literature had hardly progressed beyond the crude formulations of the seventeenth-century materialists. No method had been devised for analysing the relationship between social structure and its art; there were few genuine insights. There were no mediating factors, and literature was simply the outgrowth of climate, soil, and national spirit. Thus the sheer arbitrariness of the explanations, and while Madame de Staël did at least propose the modifying influence of the political and legal framework on a society's literature, her final analysis would always revert to the indefinable spirit of the nation. It would be wrong, however, to dismiss these early attempts at a proto-sociology of literature, for there was another aspect to the question apart from the emphasis on climate and national character.

During the last years of the eighteenth century a new theme announced itself, the increasing trend to various forms of literary and artistic fragmentation, a theme, of course, which has persisted to this day. Thus for Adam Smith (1723–90) the arts of poetry, music, and dancing were originally a unified whole, with the tribal chiefs, for example, combining the art of legislator with those of the poet and the musician.† Another Scot, Adam Ferguson (1723–1816), accepting this so-called 'primitivistic' view of man, argued that by nature man was a poet since poetry expressed his innermost sentiments. 'The early history of all nations,' he wrote, 'is uniform in this particular. Priests, statesmen and philosophers, in the first ages of Greece,

* Similarly, the German philosopher, Hegel, in his lectures on the philosophy of history in Berlin, 1822–3, argued that national literatures fully expressed their societies, societies conceived as organisms continually transforming themselves under the influence of the dominant spirit.

† A. Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. J. M. Lothian, Edinburgh, Nelson, 1963.

delivered their instructions in poetry, and mixed with the dealers in music and heroic fable.' But this was a precarious unity which gradually dissolved in the face of growing economic and social differentiation – both Smith and Ferguson were among the first to grasp fully the social significance of the division of labour, for while it had the effect of producing great wealth and abundance it was also instrumental in breaking the organic structure of pre-industrial society, turning men into the objects, not the subjects, of the historical process. Eighty years before Marx, Adam Ferguson observed:

> Many mechanical arts require no capacity; they succeed best under a total suppression of sentiment and reason ... Manufacturers, accordingly, prosper most where the mind is least consulted, and where the workshop may, without any great effort of imagination, be considered as an engine, the parts of which are men.

A developed division of work, while essential for commodity production, has the unintended effect of turning literature into the specialized function of a separate social group and, with the growth of commerce, into a trade, a commodity:

> The talents of men come to be employed in a variety of affairs, and their inquiries directed to different subjects ... The science of nature, morals, politics and history, find their several admirers; and even poetry itself ... appears in a growing variety of forms.*

There is here a suggestion of the process which Marx would call 'alienation'. Both Ferguson and Smith were suggesting that as society becomes increasingly commercial and industrial, man and his arts are unintentionally torn away from a living organic relation with society itself. Ideas such as these find expression in the philosophies of Frederick Schiller (1759–1805) and Hegel (1770–1831). Schiller argued explicitly that labour, through the soul-destroying agencies of economic specialization and the commercial spirit, acted as the chief destroying agent of 'aesthetic civilization'. Against labour he proposed the concept of play (*Spiel*), the spontaneous and aesthetic contemplation of nature which would act in healing the split between man and nature, between intellect and sense. Art, Schiller suggested, will provide the civilizing element reuniting

* A. Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), ed. D. Forbes, Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh Press, 1966, part IV, sections 1–2.

man and returning his wholeness to him.* Hegel, like Schiller, stressed man's divorce from 'living nature', from other men. Accepting de Bonald's maxim that literature was an expression of society, he argued that while the epic was the perfect expression of 'heroic ages', a kind of national spirit, the modern world with its specialization and individualism tears man away from the deep relationship with nature on which epic action rests. The contemporary world, Hegel suggested, with its systems of bureaucracy, its police forces, its extended division of work, finds a substitute for the epic in the novel, 'the middle class epic' as he calls it. Hegel talks of the novel as a form of consciousness, with each age possessing its own 'prevailing mental attitude', its own 'specific outlook on the world', which produces its own particular artistic forms. Thus the consciousness of the contemporary world is the 'prosaic mind' expressed in the novel form, faithfully reflecting that world's fragmentation and loss of unity.†

One can trace, therefore, during the latter part of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, two approaches gradually developing in the social study of literature. There was the movement which became known as positivism,‡ the search for material, scientifically ascertainable causal connections between 'facts' such as climate, geography, and race, and literature, which was generally defined to include philosophy and politics. Literature itself was as much a fact as the others and with a similar status in scientific research. As such the approach implied the absence of absolute standards: artistic evaluation was wholly dependent on time, place, and function; it was completely relative. Against this strictly empirical attitude was ranged the argument that literature was much more

* F. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), ed. and trans. E. M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1967. On Schiller, see Wellek, *The Later Eighteenth Century*, ch. 11; G. Lukács, *Goethe and His Age*, London, Merlin Press, 1968.

† G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Fine Art*. Much of Hegel's analysis of literature and society is embedded in the early work of G. Lukács and through him, Lucien Goldmann (see chapter 3 below).

‡ The term 'positivism' became synonymous with scientific method during the nineteenth century. In the social sciences it was a doctrine which made an appeal to the facts the only viable foundation of sound knowledge, facts which should support observable laws of society; its aim was to apply the methods of natural sciences to the study of human society.

than a simple or indeed a complex reflection of society as a whole: it was rather the embodiment of man's essential strivings for a sense of community and 'authenticity', an attempt to grasp the meaning of a world which was being emptied of genuine values through the progressive incursions of the division of labour. On this view values become the all-important aspect of the study of literature, and a literary sociology becomes primarily the study of those values by which the individual and his society should live. There is here a strong critical conception, as distinct from the wholly scientific descriptive tendency of positivism.*

In the course of its development during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the sociology of literature would tend to keep these two differing perspectives separate – positivism through the writings of Taine, and the critical tendency through Marxists such as Lukács and Goldmann.

2

Taine – philosopher, historian, politician, and essayist – is generally regarded as the founder of the sociology of literature. Although largely ignored and forgotten outside France, Taine's work on literature and society, specious though most of it is, does contain an awareness of the basic and perennial problems which face any literary sociology.

Like his predecessor Auguste Comte (1798–1857), who coined the word 'sociology', Taine strove to develop a completely scientific outlook, to submit literature and art to the same research methods as those employed in the physical and natural sciences. 'Vice and virtue,' he once wrote, 'are products like vitriol and sugar', and thus subject to the same research status. For the scientific observer morality becomes merely a question of precise scientific formulas; Taine was constantly attacking novelists and critics who emphasized the moral intent of their work as against the purely descriptive. It would be wrong, however, to see Taine as a genuine positivist, for underpinning

* We are not suggesting, of course, that this latter critical tendency is less scientific than positivism, only that it brings values to the centre of its research. This distinction is in any case purely schematic, ignoring the many overlappings, and is merely intended to highlight the later discussion of Lukács and Goldmann.

much of his writings is a strong Hegelian element which in a paradoxical way perhaps links him with Goldmann and the Marxist tradition.*

For Taine, as with Madame de Staël and Herder, literature is traced to the material foundations of society. In the Introduction to his study of English literature †Taine wrote that a literary work was no 'mere individual play of imagination, the isolated caprice of an excited brain, but a transcript of contemporary manners, a manifestation of a certain kind of mind'.‡: Literature reflects certain ascertainable facts and emotions: Taine categorizes the novel, for example, in terms similar to Stendhal, as a 'portable mirror which can be conveyed everywhere and which is most convenient for reflecting all aspects of life and nature'.§ As the dominant literary genre of industrial society the novel shows what is, and represents no more than an 'accumulation of data which through the operation of scientific laws would fall into inevitable patterns'. Clearly any literary sociology which bases itself on such clear-cut positivism as this – literature as source of information, as documentation – can and must be prepared to study all types of literature, good, bad, and indifferent, since the problem is simply one of objective material causation and reflection. But like many sociologists Taine is loath to draw this conclusion. Literary works, he argues, 'furnish documents because they are monuments'. Different historical periods succeed in producing a harmonic relationship between genius and the age; the more deeply an artist 'penetrates into his art, the more he has penetrated into the genius of his age and race', while the mediocre artist, although his work might seem equally valid a social document,

* The Russian Marxist, George Plekhanov, who wrote extensively on literature and art, thought highly of Taine's work, arguing that his theories, although largely inaccurate, nevertheless marked a decisive advance on those of de Staël and Herder (*Essays in the History of Materialism*, London, Martin Lawrence, 1934).

† H. Taine, *History of English Literature*, trans. H. van Laun, 4 vols., London, Chatto & Windus, 1906. On Taine, see Wellek, *History of Modern Criticism*, vol. 4, *The Later Nineteenth Century*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1966, ch. 2; S. J. Kahn, *Science and Aesthetic Judgment: A Study of Taine's Critical Method*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953; H. Levin, *The Gates of Horn*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1963, ch. 1.

‡ Taine, op. cit., vol. I, p. 1.

§ Quoted in Levin, op. cit., p. 19.

is both unexpressive and unrepresentative. Only the really great artist is capable of fully expressing his time, and by 'representing the mode of being of a whole nation and a whole age, a writer rallies round him the sympathies of an entire age and an entire nation'. Art is thus the collective expression of society, with great literature embodying the spirit of the age in a manner close to Hegel's conception. The problem for Taine is to determine the causes behind the emergence of great art and literature.

Taine proposes the use of three concepts, race, moment, and milieu, arguing that they comprise the material foundations exhausting all 'real causes' and all 'possible causes of movements', and claiming that 'if these forces could be measured and deciphered, one could deduce from them . . . the characteristics of the future civilization'. The interaction of race, moment, and milieu produces either a practical or a speculative 'mental structure', and this leads to the development of the 'germinal ideas', characteristic of certain centuries and epochs, which find expression in great art and literature. The significance of this formula is not so much the statement on material causation, common enough during the nineteenth century, but rather its suggestion of the precise connections between a literary work and its society. In the history of the sociology of literature Taine's is the first real theory, far more systematic than those of de Staël or Herder, and constituting rather more than a collection of haphazard and random insights. The question is how successful was he in applying the theory?

Like any social scientific approach which sets up a number of causal, determining factors, Taine has both to differentiate between them, and to assign some kind of causal sovereignty either to one or to a clustering of these factors. Taine argues, however, that his three factors are interdependent: at some times the racial element is emphasized, at others, moment and milieu. In his study of English literature, for example, race is seen to perform a major causal role.

Taine defines race in terms of innate and hereditary characteristics, temperament, body structure, and so on, and suggests that although the many human races have been widely dispersed through the world and live in situations very different from their original habitats, 'the great marks of the original model remain'. A race acquires its characteristics from 'the soil, the food and

the great events that it underwent at its origin'.* Thus the history of English literature is seen partly as a protracted struggle waged by the original 'primitive stock' of Angles and Saxons against the imposed and alien Norman culture.

> The subjugated race is not a dismembered nation, dislocated, uprooted, sluggish . . . It grew very feebly . . . it increased, remained fixed in its own soil, full of sap: its members were not displaced; it was simply lopped in order to receive on its crown a cluster of foreign branches. True, it had suffered, but at last the wound closed, the sap mingled.†

The English civil war, in this interpretation, is the culmination of these racial antagonisms: the 'original stock' once again became the masters, a fact which the literature of the following centuries faithfully reflects. Post-civil-war literature is 'solid and practical' with a strong bent towards political satire; it is thoroughly empirical and wholly opposed to speculation. A naturally Protestant people, imbued with a 'sunny, sombre, and passionate' imagination, blessed with large feet (both sexes) and rosy-cheeked children, the Anglo-Saxons have a culture very different from the elegant and philosophically superior Normans. Having thus rewritten in racial terms what many contemporary historians had thought to be a class struggle between the aristocracy and a rising middle class, Taine consistently muddles his analysis. At one moment the Normans are described as a 'light and sociable race', with 'facile', 'abundant', and 'curious' minds, while elsewhere they are characterized as a race entirely lacking in the 'madness and genius of imagination'. Taine's slipshod methodological approach is especially marked in the distinction he makes between nation and race: on the one hand racial elements are said to 'persist through all circumstances in all climates', while on the other hand a nation has its 'original qualities . . . transformed by its environment and history'. Thus in his discussion of Dutch art Taine combines both inherent and environmentally induced factors such as marriage customs, religion, and eating habits in his analysis. Race as an explanatory factor in the analysis of literature tends to be used indiscriminately by Taine, with differences of epoch, class, and region wholly ignored. It is a simple blanket term, and

* Quoted in Wellek, op. cit., vol. IV, p. 29.
† Taine, op. cit., vol. I, p. 138.

one popular during the nineteenth century. It has little relevance to Taine's theory or indeed to any sociological theory of literature.

The second element, moment, Taine defines in a variety of ways. Its most frequent meaning is in terms of the age, the epoch, the spirit of the time. Each epoch, says Taine, has certain 'dominant ideas' and contains at least one intellectual pattern capable of surviving for centuries. Moment in this sense can thus refer to periods in which one particular conception of man prevailed, for example, the knightly ideal of the Middle Ages or, in the modern age, 'the courtier and the man who speaks well'. Moment can also mean 'literary tradition', the effect of literature on literature. Thus, discussing French tragedy in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Taine argues that while both centuries employed in their drama the same human types and dramatic situations, the eighteenth-century writers had the great advantage of working with the models of the sixteenth century. What a writer makes of the tradition which he inherits is quite clearly a major part of a literary sociology and Taine was one of the first to grasp this. But for the most part he makes only the most mundane observations, spiced with specious biological analogies which, like the concept of race, were highly popular during the nineteenth century.*

Taine, however, was mainly concerned with his third element, milieu or environment. The term was in no sense a new conception: Balzac, in the Introduction to his *Human Comedy*, had made use of it in the sense of the habitat of animals, a natural-science term derived from the writings of the zoologist Geoffrey St Hillaire. But Taine's theory of milieu has pretensions to provide a complete causal explanation of literature. Like his other concepts, milieu can mean many different things. Climate and geography naturally exercise an important influence, for in this respect Taine had hardly advanced beyond the simplistic

* 'Thus it is with people as with a plant; the same sap, under the same temperature, and in the same soil, produces, at different steps of its progressive development different formations, fruits, seed vessels, in such a manner that the one which follows must always be preceded by the former and must spring up from his death' (Taine, op. cit.). This evolutionary conception of literature is one which many French critics after Taine accepted, especially Ferdinand Brunetière, for whom literary tradition was the key element in literature's growth (see chapter 4 below).

formulations of the eighteenth-century writers. Thus we find him virtually repeating Madame de Staël's climatic clichés: cold, moist countries induce a variety of ills, ranging from 'melancholy and violent sensations' to gluttony, drunkenness, and warlike personalities; an excessive amount of rain has the further consequence of providing thought with a sinister element, especially in England. A 'bright and pleasant sea coast' on the other hand, one which incorporates some advance in commerce and navigation, will produce 'settled social organizations' characterized by oratory, science, and literature. Madame de Staël's melancholic Nordic personality haunts the discussion. Thus Taine disparages Restoration comedy and the humorous writings of Dr Johnson on the grounds that to a sophisticated Frenchman they were wholly dull and insipid.

Taine's search for a simple cause and effect relationship between elements of the milieu and literature frequently leads him to make the most absurd and crude analyses. Thus in his analysis of Dutch art, for example, he constructs the most banal correlations:

> ... water makes grass, grass makes cattle, cattle make cheese, butter, and meat; and all these, with beer, make the inhabitant. Indeed, out of this rich living, and out of this physical organization, saturated with moisture, spring the phlegmatic temperament, the regular habits, the tranquil mind and nerves, the capacity for taking life easily and prudently, the unbroken contentment, the love of well being, and, consequently, the reign of cleanliness and the perfection of comfort.*

The point is, of course, that climate and geography are fully deterministic and there is never any question of the individual freeing himself from these conditions, no conception of self-consciousness. Man is entangled in Taine's broad climatic truth: the North is sad, the South is joyous.†

On the other hand, when Taine analyses literature more closely he tends to shift his arguments, making a more determined effort to relate particular literature to social and political conditions. But again he is disappointing. Each separate dis-

* Quoted in Wellek, op. cit., p. 33, from *Philosophie d'Art* (1865).
† The influence of sunshine on literature, Albert Guerard has remarked, 'seems to be mostly moonshine' (*Society and Literature*, Boston, Lothrop, Lee, and Shepherd, 1935, p. 52).

cussion is prefaced by a preliminary sketch of the social and political background of the literature under discussion, which is no more than potted superficial history and, like Madame de Staël, full of empty rhetoric. It is only when Taine writes on the literary audience that a more serious contribution to a sociology of literature is suggested. He notes, for example, the fact that 'literature always adapts itself to the taste of those who can appreciate and pay for it'. Thus, comparing Tennyson and the French poet Alfred de Musset, he observes that while the former wrote for his family circle, sportsmen, wealthy and cultivated businessmen and lovers of the countryside, Musset was appealing to intellectuals, Bohemian artists, and women of leisure, two distinct audiences which supposedly conditioned the form and content of their work. Similarly, Taine argues that seventeenth-century French drama was essentially the 'child of the courtly nobility', a fact reflected in its excessive stylization and choice of heroes.*

While Taine was clearly aware of the strong economic pressures on literary production, he rarely went beyond crude correlations. He made few serious attempts to link the economics of writing, the economic aspects of milieu, which had become so marked during the commercially-minded nineteenth century, with the literary text itself. As with the other parts of his conception of milieu, his tendency is always to explain the literary work mechanically, as a response to external conditions. There is nothing in any of his analyses of actual textual criticism, of linking specific parts of the text with specific external facts. Thus in his essay on Balzac, which Wellek describes as the 'high point' of his criticism, Taine argues that the whole basis of the *Human Comedy* rested on Balzac's failure to realize his ambition and greed for money in the world of commerce. Balzac's novels, Taine concluded, flowed from one simple truth: he was a businessman, and a 'businessman in debt'.

All this, then, suggests a profoundly mechanical form of materialism. But as was suggested earlier, Taine's peculiar hotch-potch system of causation has blended with it a curious Hegelian flavour. It almost seems that Taine was determined to refute his own theory for, dissatisfied with his three major

* Cited in Wellek, op. cit., vol. IV, p. 34.

determining elements, he reinforced the formula with a psychological dimension.

> Man, forced to accommodate himself to circumstances, contracts a temperament and a character corresponding to them; and his character, like his temperament, is so much more stable, as the external impression is made upon him by more numerous repetitions, and is transmitted to his progeny . . . So that at any moment we may consider the character of a people as an abridgement of all its preceding actions and sensations; that is, as a quantity and as a weight . . .*

But this is the deterministic Taine. In his actual analyses of literature he frequently remarks that literary achievement is essentially a 'problem of psychological mechanics', of the artist's dominant ruling passions.† Indeed, the fundamental cause of all art and literature, of every kind of 'human production', is the 'moral disposition' of the artist; the key is the artist's 'master faculty'. Taine had no wish, it seems, to dissolve literature into a matter of simple material terms, for like any good nineteenth-century bourgeois he clearly wishes to retain the magic, the genius, of the individual artist in the process of cultural creation. Thus, after discussing the material facts which lead to the emergence of Shakespeare he remarks that, notwithstanding his analysis, 'all comes from within – I mean from his soul and his genius: circumstances and externals have contributed but slightly to his development'.‡ And of Dickens:

> It is not through the accidental circumstances of his life that he belongs to history, but by his talent . . . A man's genius is like a clock; it has its mechanism and among its parts a mainspring . . . This inner history of genius does not depend upon the outer history of mankind; and it is worth more.§

Taine has quite clearly abandoned his materialistic scheme in favour of a more shadowy, non-empirical, psychological ex-

* Taine, op. cit., vol. I, p. 18.
† Wellek has pointed out that Taine held a profoundly irrational view of man. Taine himself wrote of man as 'a nervous machine, governed by a temperament, disposed to hallucinations, transported by unbridled passions, essentially unreasoning, a mixture of animal and poet'. Thus artists are conceived as monomaniacs with one dominant ruling passion, that of imagination (op. cit., vol. IV, p. 46). Taine thought in terms of types in his analysis of literature, and one definition of the type which he used was as ideal, the hero, 'the powerful, elemental passionate man', whom he finds in Shakespeare and Balzac (ibid., p. 40).
‡ Taine, op. cit., vol. II, p. 50.
§ ibid., IV, p. 117.

planation. All great change, he argues, is rooted not in social structure but in man's soul: 'The psychological state is the cause of the social state.' His revision of materialism is thus complete.

This brings us to our final point on Taine's literary sociology. His rejection of an all-pervasive materialism allows him to choose great literary works for analysis. He has, like Hegel, equated artistic greatness with historical development and progress, arguing that particular ages crystallize in great works because the great artist's superior 'moral state' enables him to grasp the essence, the truth of reality. Taine's obvious dilemma was the contradiction, generated by his materialist theory, between its application to literature and art and his desire to allow some measure of autonomy to the creative spirit. There is here one of the major and persistent problems in the sociology of literature: from Taine to Lukács and Goldmann there has been a tendency to accept the traditional literary critics' view of the superiority of great literature because of its supposed monopoly of crucial social and human insights. At the same time, it must be noted that Taine frequently uses literature as a document,* and throughout his writings there runs a strong and persistent reductionist element. He has no conception of the *literary text* as the focal point of research.

But his concepts and general outlook made their impact. Academic research became dominated by the positivistic method which Taine very largely enshrined, to the extent that it concentrated so 'heavily upon the backgrounds of literature that the foreground was all but obliterated'.† As the Danish critic George Brandes, an ardent champion of Taine, expressed it, the artist 'is nothing but a good observer who by a happy accident has also the capacity to give shape to his observations'.‡

Taine, then, had developed a theory but no method of applying it systematically. The theory itself was largely specious and,

* Thus he uses one definition of type as a source of information on social structure, especially class structure. But this is a very general application.

† Levin, op. cit., p. 12.

‡ Quoted in O. Seidlin, *Essays in German and Comparative Literature*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1961, ch. 1, 'George Brandes'. For Brandes, as for other positivists, the literary work was used to illuminate the author's life, and the life to support and determine the work. Life and work were seen as dual entities causally related, requiring only research to compare and mutually clarify.

perhaps because of Taine's lack of rigour, other writers turned to a new theory which, by defining milieu in terms of economic factors and social class, appeared to provide a more realistic as well as a more rigorous sociological approach.

3

In 1848 two young German revolutionaries, Karl Marx (1818–83) and Frederick Engels (1820–95), published a document which was to make a lasting impression on the history of mankind. The *Communist Manifesto*, in many ways a summation of previous materialism, argued that the social history of man was the history of class struggle; that history possessed a discernible pattern defined as stages of development, antiquity, feudalism, and capitalism, with socialism to follow, each one characterized by a particular mode of production and class structure. Capitalism represented the most advanced stage of social production, based on commodity production and wage labour and employing an extensive division of labour and sophisticated technology. In the sense of revolutionizing the means of production, that is, in breaking the static feudal social relations and stagnant system of production, capitalism represented a progressive social formation. As far as literature was concerned this implied the impossibility of 'national one-sidedness' since capitalism develops the 'numerous national and local literatures' into a 'world literature'. The paradox is obvious: while capitalism creates a profoundly unequal and conflict-ridden society, it unintentionally builds a literature which transcends class, region, and nation, speaking out to men everywhere.

Taine, as we have seen, argued that literature was largely the expression of environment, heredity, and creative genius: Marx and Engels, although couching their analysis of literature equally in terms of its material foundations, were more concerned with purely economic factors and the important role played by social class. Unlike Taine, they provided no systematic account of a theory of literature and society, and it was left to their followers to create a specifically Marxist sociology of literature. The results were poor. In many cases an extremely one-sided and mechanical explanation was put forward, dogmatically defining literature as a mere epiphenomenon of the

social structure. Lunacharsky, the first Soviet Minister of Culture under Lenin, could thus write that the role of the Marxist critic was to provide 'a complete picture of the entire social development of an epoch', since 'literary work always reflects the conscious or unconscious psychology of that class which the given writer expresses'. To assess accurately any work of literature, Lunacharsky went on, one must begin with its content, its 'social essence', seeking to link this with specific social groups. Literary form is especially important: when detached from its content it shows a tendency to acquire an 'isolated, elusive character', characteristic of 'class tendencies which are devoid of content, which fear real life, and which try to hide from this life behind a screen of verbal gymnastics of a high flown, pompous or . . . facetious and frivolous nature'.* These quotations may serve as an illustration of the ways in which many Marxist writers approached the study of literature and society, and which has moved one recent critic to term it the 'dogmatic theory of social criticism'.† In interpretations such as Lunacharsky's the causal nexus is wholly explicit: form is defined by content and content by the historical alignment of class forces. It must be said, at once, that the founders of Marxism, although ambiguous in many of their comments, were rarely as dogmatic as this.

As a student at the university of Bonn, Marx much preferred literary composition to attending formal lecture courses; the university records attest to his greater concern with purely aesthetic problems than those of law.‡ He composed poetry, ballads, half a novel (subtitled *A Humorous Tale*), and the first act of a Gothic tragedy. But by the early 1840s Marx's interest in literature had waned, replaced by a passion for philosophy, economics, politics, and history. Under the influence of German philosophical idealism, especially Hegel, French socialism, notably Fourier and Saint Simon, and English political economy, Marx moved towards a complete materialistic explanation of the social world. Together with Engels he fashioned a dialectical and historical interpretation of social development, one which

* A. Lunacharsky, *On Literature and Art*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1965.
† L. T. Lemon, *The Partial Critics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1965.
‡ Details on Marx's early life have been drawn from P. Demetz, *Marx, Engels and the Poets*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1965, especially ch. 3.

gave priority to the contradictions and conflicts endemic in all social processes, arguing that social change results in the main from conflict between antagonistic social classes.*

Two themes dominate the early writings of Marx and Engels, the all-pervasive social influences of ideology and the division of labour. The concept of ideology pointed to the social conditioning of all thought, that different kinds of thinking, whether philosophical, economic, or historical, represented no more than a perspective related to the writer's class position, a one-sided, distorted view of the world.† They argued that it was only under 'definite historical conditions' in specific social contexts that the 'ideological reflexes' developed:

> The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions . . . real active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces . . . We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premisses. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.‡

* Marx's and Engels' theory of history has been called historical and dialetical materialism, since it borrowed from Hegel the concept of dialectics – that all phenomena have their opposites and their contradictions, that everything is in a constant state of flux and that change is both sudden and gradual, qualitative and quantitative. From French socialism it absorbed the idea of social class as the motor force of change, as well as the notions of socialism and communism. From Ricardo and Smith, Marx and Engels derived their emphasis on economic factors in social life and in social change. The pivot of their theory is perhaps contained in the famous statement of the *Communist Manifesto*: 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.'
† This conception of ideology plays an important part in the sociology of Goldmann (see chapter 3 below).
‡ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (1846), part 1.

One sees here an important difference between the method of historical materialism and the positivism of Taine: if social life is the determinant of all thought then the psychological dimension which is so crucial for Taine is relegated to the status of a minor influence. Marx and Engels, following Smith and Ferguson, were convinced of the crucial role exercised by the division of labour for social life which, as it became widespread with the development of commerce and industry, had the effect of removing certain individuals and groups from the sphere of material production to that of mental production. The division of labour, they argued, produced what they called 'pure theory', that is thought which was unsullied by mere material considerations, such as philosophy, theology, and, by implication, art and literature. Under the brutal economic dictates of the capitalist market, the need for profit, literature was being progressively 'industrialized'.* Writing becomes a specialized trade like any other.†

These trends are reflected in literature. As we have seen, the notion of literature as a reflection of society was a popular nineteenth-century conception, and Marx and Engels are no exceptions in adhering to this view. They frequently refer to literature as reflecting reality in various ways, although it must be noted that important differences distinguish their analysis from that of Taine and others. For example, in his comments on Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*, Marx pointed to the play as reflecting the social function of money, its 'divine power' controlling men and constituting its social essence, its social character. Marx, however, adds a further dimension to his discussion: money is not merely the means of controlling men but embodies man's

* At roughly the same time that Marx and Engels were noting the social significance of the division of labour, the great French critic Sainte-Beuve, in a celebrated essay, *On Industrial Literature* (1839), pointed to the encroaching commercialization and the trend towards a conception of literature as trade. Unlike Marx and Engels, however, the division of labour was not the pivot of his analysis.

† Marx and Engels often compared modern man unfavourably with Renaissance man, arguing that the division of labour had led to a largely fragmented social type. Renaissance man, for example, possessed mastery in many languages, travelled extensively, and had wide-ranging intellectual interests: modern man was by comparison a mere shadow. Their point was, of course, that the former 'wholeness' could be recaptured only through socialism and communism.

'estranged being', his alienation from himself and society, and as such represents the 'alienated ability of mankind'.

> My own power is as great as the power of money. The properties of money are my own properties and faculties. What I *am* and *can do* is, therefore, not at all determined by my individuality. I *am* ugly, but I can buy the most beautiful woman for myself. Consequently I am not *ugly* for the effect of ugliness, its power to repel, is annulled by money . . . What I as a *man* am unable to do, and thus what all my individual faculties are unable to do, is made possible for me by *money*. Money, therefore, turns each of these faculties into something which it is not, into its *opposite*.*

Marx praises Shakespeare for describing the essence of money as a thing standing outside man, controlling his social behaviour yet created by him for his use. This 'externalization', this 'objectification' of things, the concept of 'reification',† means an important philosophical accretion to the solely descriptive. Linked with the argument of the division of labour, capitalist society in Marx's and Engels's terms can thus be seen as a system which creates an alienated and reified world where man has lost his spontaneous connections with others, where he has become a partial, a fragmented being.

These early comments suggest a somewhat deterministic conception of literature: economic forces condition the structure of ideas within society and these coalesce into an ideology which reflects the 'false' consciousness of a social class. Thus in *The German Ideology* (1846) the relationship between literature and the economic structure of society is conceived simply in terms of strict economic causality: art as ideology has no autonomy.

Following the failure of the 1848 revolutions and the subsequent lull in political activity, Marx had begun working on his vast economic and sociological study of capitalism. His absorption in economic sociology meant fewer comments on literature than before. But they do exist. In 1857, in a preface written for his *Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy*, Marx posed the intriguing problem of the apparent contradiction between

* Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1844), third manuscript.

† The notion of reification as a tool of analysis in literature is used by Goldmann in his discussion of Robbe-Grillet and the French New Novel (see chapter 3 below). For a general discussion of the concept, see P. Berger and S. Pulberg, 'Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness', *New Left Review*, January/February 1966.

the largely backward material culture of Ancient Greece, and its advanced art, 'the unequal relationship of the development of material production . . . to artistic production'.

> It is well known that certain periods of the highest development of art stand in no direct connection with the general development of society, nor with the material basis and the skeleton structure of its organization. Witness the Greeks as compared with modern nations or even Shakespeare.*

The real source of Greek art lay in its system of myths: its material foundations, therefore, are to be found in the religious superstructure, and not directly within the economic substructure. As for the timeless appeal of Homer and Aeschylus, Marx's answer is similar to Vico's: Greek civilization was man's 'natural childhood', and not, as Hegel had supposed, his adolescence, with its innocence, vitality, and spontaneity carrying an aesthetic appeal across the centuries. This non-sociological account, with its emphasis on psychology rather than on economic structure, contrasts sharply with Engels's later formulation of the *Iliad* as a textbook of economic analysis and a simple mirror of the age.† Marx's manuscript, however, was left uncompleted and the problems he had raised were seemingly forgotten. But two years later, in 1859, in the Foreword to the *Critique*, the thesis of strict economic causality is again invoked:

> In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production . . . conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general.‡

* Marx and Engels, *Literature and Art*, New York, International Publishers, 1947, p. 18.

† Engels declared that the *Iliad* reflected population increase 'with the expansion of herds and agriculture, the beginnings of artisanship', while the Homeric poems reflected development in metalworking, shipbuilding, and architecture (cited from *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, in Demetz, op. cit.).

‡ Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958, vol. 1, pp. 362–3. During the 'thaw' in the Soviet Union this pronouncement was liberally quoted, while in the 'freeze' periods the more ambiguous passage from the 1857 *Preface* was used (Demetz, op. cit., p. 242).

It would be wrong, however, to infer from this that Marx had settled his views on the relationship of art with society. He was clearly concerned with stating a general methodological principle, that on the whole the economic structure of society will largely condition its mode of thought; it could still leave room for a certain degree of artistic autonomy.

From the scattered comments he made on literature after this pronouncement it is clear that Marx was no economic dogmatist. In 1869 he wrote caustically of the crude sociological analysis which the French critic Jules Janin had carried out on Diderot's famous eighteenth-century novel, *Rameau's Nephew*. The main character in this novel is a cynical, almost nihilistic sponger, and to reduce Diderot's complex portrait to the simple suggestion by Janin that Rameau's 'perversity' flowed from his failure to become a '*gentilhomme*' offended Marx. He much preferred Hegel's characterization of Rameau as the 'self-conscious and self-expressing pessimism of the consciousness' affirming his self through his 'imperious spirit' and his 'scornful laughter at existence'. Marx's interpretation is hardly dogmatic, and in its conception of the alienated self struggling to some form of self-consciousness is clearly looking forward to Lukács on the one hand and backward on the other to the 1844 philosophical manuscripts.* Both here, and in his remarks on Shakespeare and Balzac, admired not as representatives of economic interests but as great artists, Marx is opposing crude sociological analysis. His remarks, of course, are not in any sense a programme for a sociology of literature: the task of formulating a more systematic Marxist literary theory devolved on Engels.

It has already been observed that more than once Engels treats literature as a mirror reflection of social processes. His later writings, containing two important texts for the Marxist theory of literature, tend to vacillate between economic dogmatism and artistic autonomy. In 1877 he wrote against the crude economic views expressed in *The German Ideology*. In what he called the 'higher ideologies', philosophy, theology,

* Marx and Engels, *Literature and Art*, pp. 69–70. G. Lukács, in his *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), was the first Marxist to suggest the radical Hegelian roots of Marx's theories, long before the discovery of the 1844 philosophical manuscripts which support this interpretation. Marx's comments on *Rameau's Nephew* lend further support to this view.

etc., 'the interconnections between the ideas and their material condition of existence become more and more complicated, more and more obscured by intermediate links'.* The content of art, literature, and philosophy, he went on, is far richer and more opaque than the content of political science and economics, which tend to be expressed more directly in purely ideological terms. This does not mean, of course, that social factors have no influence on the form and content of art and literature, only that these are much more independent than economics and political science and that the linkages between them and society are more obscure, more veiled and the content less obviously ideological. In his comments on two rather mediocre novelists, Engels supports these views.

The two writers were Minna Kautsky, the mother of Karl Kautsky, leader of the German social democratic party, and Mary Harkness, an aspiring English socialist. Both women submitted their novels to Engels's critical judgement. Minna Kautsky had fictionalized class conflict in Austria, her novel (*The Old and the New*, 1885) opening with a mountain landslide and the sudden appearance of an economist called Marr whose 'mighty head with the silver white mane flowing about it' clearly indicated its real-life model. Miss Harkness in *A City Girl* (1887) told the somewhat unlikely tale of an innocent working-class girl who, seduced on a weekend trip to Kew, becomes pregnant, gains help from the Salvation Army and then when her child dies is shown the empty cot by none other than her seducer, now the hospital secretary. After these tribulations, her first love, whom she had abandoned, not wishing to disgrace his family, reappears, and love and bourgeois marriage carry the day.†

In his comments on these two novels Engels made two basic points. First, the 'overt political tendency' of the writer should be implicit; political ideology is not the major concern of the artist and the work itself benefits if the author's views remain hidden. While not wholly opposed to strictly tendentious literature, Engels urged that the point of any novel must emerge naturally from the situation and action depicted within it: 'I

* Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1877).
† Marx and Engels, *Literature and Art*, pp. 41–6.

believe that there is no compulsion for the writer to put into the reader's hands the future historical resolution of the social conflict which he is depicting.

> A socialist-biased novel fully achieves its purpose . . . if, by conscientiously describing real mutual relations, breaking down conventional illusions about them, it shatters the optimism of the bourgeois, instils doubt as to the eternal character of the existing order, although the author does not offer any definite solution or does not even line up openly on any particular side.*

For Engels, Balzac is the epitome of this approach, for although a Catholic and political reactionary he was forced, through the dictates of his art, to go against his own political interests and class sympathies: 'He saw the necessity of the downfall of his favourite nobles . . . he saw the real men of the future.' The writer, then, can articulate in a quite non-conscious way on ideology which he would consciously repudiate. The so-called 'para Marxists',† characterize those Marxists who adhere to Engels's formulation, and whose aesthetics are diametrically opposed to dogmatic Marxism with its emphasis on an activist and committed literature.‡

Engels's second point is more dogmatic. He argues that any novelist who is striving for realism must aim to create in his works 'representative figures', since the notion of realism 'implies beside truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical

* ibid., pp. 39–40. The English Marxist Edward Upward, in his essay, 'Sketch for a Marxist Interpretation of Literature', in C. Day Lewis (ed.), *The Mind in Chains*, London, Frederick Muller, 1937, argued that any writer who 'wishes to produce the best work that he is capable of producing, must first of all become a socialist in his practical life, must go over to the progressive side of the class conflict' (p. 32). This, of course, is fundamentally opposed to Engels's arguments and indicative of the trough into which English Marxism had sunk by the 1930s.
† A term coined by the French critic, Michel Crouzet.
‡ Thus Zhdanov, at the first Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934, proclaimed the wholly tendentious character of socialist literature. 'Our Soviet literature is not afraid of the charge of being tendentious . . . for in an epoch of class struggle there is not and cannot be a literature which is not class literature, not tendentious, allegedly non-political.' The source for this clear revision of Engels is often given as Lenin's document, *Party Organization and Party Literature* (1905), in which it is argued that literature must become party literature, 'a part of the general cause of the proletariat . . . an integral part of the organized, methodical, and unified labour of the . . . Party'. It must be borne in mind, however, that Lenin was not referring to imaginative literature but simply to political and polemical works.

characters under typical circumstances'. The concept of the 'type' in literary analysis was much in vogue during the nineteenth century. Taine had used the notion in his criticism* while the Russian realist school of Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, and Pisarev invoked it as the pivot of their social criticism.† Although the concept can be traced as far back as the Middle Ages, its secular form occurs for the first time during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.‡ In Balzac's novels, for example, the representative figure is the dominant concept: his varied human types, the miser Grandet, the scheming Madame Marneffe of *Cousin Bette*, the socially mobile careerist Rastignac, combine the qualities of a number of fairly homogeneous characters: the type in this definition is thus 'many-sided' and invested with great social richness. But there is a problem: who is to judge whether a writer has successfully created a representative figure? What are the canons of proof which will show the writer's 'truthful depiction' of reality and historical necessity? On this latter point especially, Engels seems very close to the tendentious art he had so severely criticized, and certainly he seems to be saying, with Taine, that art mirrors the age, with the dominant tendencies reflected through literature's varied gallery of 'types'.

This is fairly dogmatic. It suggests a direct one-to-one relation between the economic and material base of society and its literary superstructure, the very problem which had first been raised in Marx's ambiguous writings of the 1850s. At the close of his life, in the 1890s, Engels attempted to revise the early economic dogmatism. In a series of letters replying to some well-intentioned criticism of Marxism, Engels moved progressively away from strict economic causality.

The materialist method, he wrote in one of the letters, will

* Taine's most persistent use of the concept of 'type' was as an ideal: the powerful, the elemental heroes of fiction, who 'manifest better than others the important characters, the elementary forces, the deepest layers of human nature'. (For a discussion of Taine's use of the term, see Wellek, op. cit., vol. IV.)

† In Dobrolyubov's essay on Goncharov's *Oblomov*, the main character is seen as a specifically Russian type from whom it is possible to extrapolate social tendencies. See Dobrolyubov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956, pp. 174–218. Cf. Wellek, op. cit., vol. IV, ch. 11.

‡ For a discussion of this, see Demetz, op. cit., pp. 135 ff.

certainly fail if used as a 'prefabricated pattern according to which one adjusts the historical facts'. To another correspondent Engels wrote of the economic factor as the ultimate determining element, but only 'in the long run', and that between all the factors in a given situation, ideological as well as material, there is constant mutual interaction. The absolute sovereignty of economics has been dethroned: the problem becomes the degree of freedom enjoyed by the superstructure. Thus discussing the philosophy of the Enlightenment, Engels suggested that while economic forces influence philosophical tradition it is nevertheless the 'political and moral reflexes which exercise the greatest direct influence'. If economic factors have therefore an indirect influence on philosophy, then it would seem plausible to claim the same for literature. In another letter Engels claims that although political, religious, and literary development hinge on the economic factor, this does not imply monistic determination but 'rather mutual interaction based upon economic necessity that always realizes itself ultimately. The further the area we are investigating is removed from the economic sphere and approaches that of abstract ideology, the more we will find that it shows accidents in its development and the more the curve will run in a zig-zag.' He concludes by reasserting the view that over a long period of time the curve will follow that of the economic structure of society.*

In the writings of both Marx and Engels, then, there is no fashioned theory of literature's relation with society, but merely hints, ambiguity, and some dogma. Their followers, on the other hand, with responsibility to develop the Marxist theory of literature, singularly failed to do so.† They succeeded in raising questions but developed no method – they could claim possibly that their interests lay elsewhere, in the practical transformation of the social world. One writer who did devote a considerable part of his talent to literature was the Russian, George Plekhanov (1857–1918) in whose work one finds both Engels's notion of social mirror and the concept of type.

* Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 11, pp. 486–506.

† There have, of course, been many Marxist studies of literature. But most are of absolutely no value at all: they are either tendentious, muddled, or simply banal. For a useful discussion of this, see G. Steiner, 'Marxism and Literature', *Language and Silence*, London, Faber, 1967, especially pp. 335–55, 387–96.

Plekhanov's study of literature emphasized the weaknesses of early Marxist literary sociology. He naturally stated the explicit sociological foundations of art and literature, but in doing so tended to lapse into crude mechanical correlations. He tended, too, to dismiss most literature written after 1850 as a form of bourgeois apologetic.

His approach was remarkably eclectic for a Marxist, borrowing heavily not only from Marx but also from Kant and Taine. From Marx he derived the social function of art. 'Art begins when the human being recalls within himself feelings and ideas that he has had under the influence of the reality surrounding him and gives them a certain figurative expression.'* Art and literature are bound to the means of production and property relations in a largely deterministic nexus.† But Plekhanov is not satisfied with this wholly materialistic interpretation. He goes further than Taine in striving to break out of a too rigid materialist explanation by introducing the notion of an inborn sense of beauty. Man, he argues, has the capacity to judge good from bad, he has an aesthetic sense which Plekhanov derived from the aesthetic writings of Kant.‡ He was fully aware that merely showing the social function of art leaves unanswered the question of value. Kant's idealistic aesthetic, that good can be judged only in a disinterested, and not an involved, emotional state, served as the bridge from the social to the ultimate judgement since although the aesthetic sense is a gift of nature, man is doubly lucky – he has a 'contemplative faculty' which leads him to reject aesthetically all art that is wholly utilitarian, art that arouses only 'considerations of social good'. The aesthetic sense leads man to accept great art and enjoy it for its own sake – a remarkable analysis for a Marxist. To accept Kant's aesthetic cuts right across Plekhanov's conception of the class character of

*Plekhanov, *Art and Social Life* (1912), London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1953, p. 20.

† Another of the themes in Plekhanov was the insistence of work's priority over art, labour over art: 'In the life of society . . . labour is older than play.' Again one sees here the nineteenth-century belief in simple cause and effect: there is no conception that both developed together in unison.

‡ Plekhanov went as far as to suggest that human nature possessed a faculty for recognizing the musical nature of rhythm, and for its appreciation – he added, of course, that the means of production was the major determining factor in its further social development (ibid., p. 4).

art, and it is difficult to reconcile his constant reiteration of art as 'predominantly a reflection of social life' – that art has significance only when it 'depicts or evokes or conveys actions, emotions and events that are of significance to society'* – with his view of a non-social, classless aesthetic instinct. The antithesis is further brought out in his discussion of the ways in which art actually reflects social life.

The concept of reflection, Plekhanov suggests, hinges on grasping the 'mainspring' of social life, that is, the fact of class struggle. Cultural history, he asserts dogmatically, represents no more than a 'reflection of the history of its classes of their struggle, one with the other'.† Thus in his discussion of eighteenth-century French drama, Plekhanov argued that the supremacy of tragedy over farce reflected the cultural and economic dominance of the upper classes, for while farce was eminently lower class, tragedy, the 'creation of the aristocracy', directly expressed the upper classes' social and political views, aspirations and tastes. Plekhanov cites Taine as support for his view that French tragedy under Louis XIV stemmed from the demands of the courtly aristocracy. Its main characters were either kings or those with a high social status, and a dramatist 'whose works lacked the necessary conventional dose of aristocratic superiority would never have won the applause of the audience of his day, however great his talent'. But with the rise of the bourgeois class at the end of the century, a new dramatic model makes its appearance – 'sentimental comedy' – in which the hero is no longer depicted as a 'superior being' but rather as an idealized 'man of the middle estate'.

Thus, according to Plekhanov, fairly straightforward correlations exist between the strong social and political position of the French aristocracy and monarchy and the revival of classical tragedy, and between the middle classes and the decline of classical drama. The theatre is the direct expression of the class struggle. And the class struggle is crucial for grasping the meaning of modern art and literature. The contemporary trend of 'art for art's sake' is seen by Plekhanov as the direct expression of the alienated artist 'in discord with his social environ-

* Plekhanov, op. cit., pp. 60, 108–9.
† Plekhanov, p. 164.

ment'. French novelists such as Flaubert and the Goncourt brothers in consciously rejecting bourgeois society end with an overpowering pessimism which expresses itself in the concept of an autonomous art and artist, for having attacked the middle classes for smugness and narrow-minded philistinism, artists were unable to identify with the new progressive class, the proletariat. The implication is obvious: the bourgeois period after 1848 can produce great literature only if its writers associate themselves *mentally* with the future, that is with socialism.*

This mechanical analysis of the relations between literature and society, which repudiates virtually all post-1848 literature as mere bourgeois apologetics, is the dogmatic cornerstone of the Marxist literary criticism which developed after the Russian Revolution, and especially after the death of Lenin and the growth of bureaucratic socialism. A Marxist literary sociology comes to enshrine Plekhanov's simple truth that all literature is class-bound and great literature is incompatible with bourgeois dominance. Georg Lukács, the most prominent Marxist theoretician of literature after Plekhanov, virtually accepts this dogmatic and negative perspective, and in his writings on modern literature can see only degeneration and despair.†

Lukács accepts Plekhanov's argument that literature reflects the class struggle. 'The historical novel,' he writes, 'in its origin, development, rise, and decline follows inevitably upon the great social transformations of modern times.'‡ Lukács's basic theme, one which runs through all his Marxist writings on literature,§ is the decline of great bourgeois realism, 'critical realism', in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and its

* ibid., pp. 191–2. Plekhanov argues that writers such as Zola, while appearing to attack the middle class, actually support bourgeois society. Zola's naturalism fails to grasp the social determinants of men's actions, desires, habits, etc., explaining man rather in terms of physiology and pathology. Persons are depicted as individuals but not as 'members of a great social unity'. The naturalistic method was incapable of seeing new trends and had to end with a critical acceptance of bourgeois society.

† Especially in his *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, London, Merlin Press, 1963.

‡ G. Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, London, Merlin Press, 1962, p. 17.

§ Lukács's writings fall into two distinct phases. The first is mainly the pre-Marxist works of his early years, roughly 1908–19, which will be discussed in the next chapter, and the second, the Marxist writings which followed his entry into the Hungarian Communist Party in 1919. The works referred to in this chapter are as follows: *Studies in European Realism*, New York,

replacement by a specious technical literature. Like Plekhanov, Lukács accepts a mechanical correlation between creative literature and the class structure: after 1848 it is impossible to write novels without rejecting or accepting a socialist perspective; writers who ally themselves with the bourgeoisie will merely reflect that class's historical decline. His attacks on 'modernism' clearly embody a dogmatic orthodoxy which had served Lukács well during the years he spent in Stalin's Russia in the 1930s and later as chief Communist spokesman on cultural matters for the Hungarian socialist bureaucracy.*

All literature, Lukács argues, is written from the point of view of a class, a world view, and thus implies a perspective. His criticism of modern literature is that it denies perspective precisely because it pretends to an 'unbiased', objective view of the world; without perspective there cannot be any distinction between the significant and superficial features of reality, only an unselective reportage which indiscriminately lumps together the trivial and the important. Like Plekhanov, Lukács makes fidelity to socialism the touchstone of artistic creativity – the writer who rejects socialism 'closes his eyes to the future, gives up any chance of assessing the present correctly, and loses the ability to create other than purely static works of art'.† This loss of a socialist humanism leads to a literature which is characterized by an intensely subjectivist outlook in which subjective experience is accepted as reality, and man depicted as alienated, isolated, and essentially morbid, lacking any meaningful relation with the social world.‡ Proust, Musil, Joyce, Samuel Beckett, illustrate for Lukács the collapse of a bourgeois literature which aimed to depict man *as a whole* into a form which portrays man as fragmented and partial. Lukács's great admiration for bourgeois realists such as Balzac and Dickens springs

Grosset & Dunlop, 1964, and *The Historical Novel*, London, Merlin Press, 1962 (both written in Russia during the 1930s); *Essays on Thomas Mann*, London, Merlin Press, 1964, and *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, London, Merlin Press, 1963 (both largely written after his return to Hungary in 1945).

* For details on Lukács's life and his uneasy relationship with Stalinism, see G. Lichteim, *Lukács*, London, Fontana/Collins, 1970; G. H. R. Parkinson, *Georg Lukács, The Man, His Work and His Ideas*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970, especially ch. 1.

† *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, p. 60.

‡ ibid., especially pp. 17–92.

from his conviction that literature is in no sense a passive cultural object, but part of the struggle, which capitalist society itself engenders through socialism, to abolish the distorting, inhuman consequences of an extended social division of labour; socialism strives to retain in its theory a vision of a fully integrated personality, 'the great perspective of the all-sided man'.* Thus contemporary modernists, having no perspective, simply depict reality in a partial, therefore distorting way: the whole man is replaced by the fragmented man; a totality by a subjective, limited impressionism.

The result of this loss of totality is that modernist literature has no 'types'. For Lukács, as for Engels, great writers are those who, in their work, create 'lasting human types', the 'real criterion of literary achievement'.† We have already seen that Engels demanded the creation of 'typical' figures in 'typical' situations as the criteria for genuine realism, and while it may be argued that here Engels was merely making a remark on a specific historical form of literature, bourgeois realism, Lukács extends this general statement into a dogma: *all* literature must be measured by this criterion.

The 'type', argues Lukács, conveys 'the innermost essence of past epochs', and it is only through the creation of 'comprehensive types' that 'the greatest values of the past have remained immortal'.‡ In his essay on Balzac's *Lost Illusions* Lukács argues that the type flows out of the artist's awareness of progressive change, that society is not a fixed, immutable thing, that it constitutes a totality of relations in flux. Thus Balzac's characters, 'complete within themselves, live and act within a concrete, complexly stratified social reality and it is always the totality of the social process that is linked with the totality of character'.§ Balzac could create the 'eternal types of capitalist society', Nucingen and Creval, while Stendhal could not, for unlike Balzac he refused to accept that the 'heroic period' of the bourgeoisie had come to its close, that from the 1830s capitalist society had triumphed and its bourgeoisie was forming a new, repressive and philistine ruling class.¶ The triumph

* Cited in Parkinson, op. cit., p. 155.
† *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, pp. 56–7.
‡ *Studies in European Realism*, pp. 115–16.
§ ibid., p. 55.
¶ ibid., pp. 78–84.

of realism was the triumph of the type, of the artist's awareness of progressive social change. Increasingly after 1830, and especially following the 1848 revolutions, writers turned to the average rather than the typical, substituting for their lack of action mere descriptions of milieu, novels without plot and genuine character.

Realism, then, declines because the subjective and objective conditions which made it possible no longer exist. Objectively the bourgeoisie is now a ruling class faced with *potential* revolution, the working class, and socialism; and subjectively, for the writer ceases to participate actively in society, he remains a mere spectator and chronicler of events. The really great novelists, Lukács writes, are 'always true-born sons of Homer' who overcome the 'unpoetic nature of their world, through sharing and experiencing the life and evolution of the society they lived in'.* Thus writers who can no longer share the aspirations of their class, the bourgeoisie, and who feel indifferent towards the working class and socialism, clearly cut themselves off from the 'intense' experience of social life which in itself is the only way to 'uncover the essential social factors that determine the world depicted'.†

Thus Lukács ends with his belief in a new, revitalized realism – socialist realism – which will transcend the old bourgeois humanism‡ and, portraying man in action struggling to achieve a socialist society, will end decisively modernist *angst*. For the bourgeois artist there is simply one choice: between the critical realism of Balzac, Tolstoy, and Mann (the lone survivor of this tradition in the twentieth century), and Kafka:

> There is no necessity for a writer to break with his bourgeois pattern of life in making this choice between social sanity and morbidity, in choosing the great and progressive literary tradition of realism in preference to formalistic experimentation.§

* *Studies in European Realism*, pp. 152–3.
† ibid., pp. 147–8.
‡ For Lukács, Tolstoy was able to continue the realist tradition precisely because capitalism had developed more slowly in Russia than in Western Europe and thus 'bourgeois ideology had not as yet been driven to apologetics' (ibid., p. 135). Thomas Mann, on the other hand, portrays 'a totality of the inner problems of contemporary bourgeois life', from the perspective 'that socialism is unavoidable if the human race is not to be swallowed up by barbarism' (*Essays on Thomas Mann*, pp. 105, 162).
§ *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, p. 80.

This is Lukács at his dogmatic worst,* incapable of understanding contemporary literature and assessing its aesthetic validity. Doubtless a novel of such pessimism as Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night* (1934) would merely reflect decadence, doubly so for its lack of a universal type – yet Trotsky in his review of Céline's novel could praise its realistic presentation of life in post-war France and America for its *detail*, its naturalism, its fearless honesty, although the author was anti-bourgeois yet not socialist – Lukács would see in it only average figures, decadent and pessimistic, with no *universal types*.†

4

Surveying the development of an explicit social interpretation of literature, from its origins in theories of *physical* determination to positivism and Marxism, it is instructive to note the areas of agreement and divergence. Both positivism and Marxism agree in citing specific external factors as the ultimate determinants of literary creativity and production, in the need to study the growth of literary audiences, reading publics, and publishing as possible conditioning factors on the structure of literature. Disagreement occurs, of course, on the question of social class and ideology.

Socially aware literary critics such as Hoggart and Watt tend to minimize the role of class in the determination of literary creativity, while for Marxists the concept constitutes the socially critical dimensions of analysis. Great literature is an expression of class interests, not the result of individual psychology, group affiliations, or type of audience. The danger here, as we have seen with Lukács, lies in a dogmatic and schematic use of class, in correlating literature with this one segment in an overtly mechanical way; a theory which dismisses most of the literature

* Lukács's slavish adherence to Stalinism can be seen in all his works written after 1923. On the other hand, a statement that Mann's novel *Dr Faustus* constitutes the 'fullest intellectual and artistic confirmation' of the notorious Zhdanov decree against modernist tendencies in art and literature, particularly 'those parts which so brilliantly describe modern music', must be seen partly as Lukács's deep-seated adherence to classical bourgeois culture, so strikingly documented in his pre-Marxist writings.

† *The Basic Writings of Trotsky*, ed. I. Howe, London, Secker & Warburg, 1963, pp. 343–56.

after 1848 as decadent and non-progressive must surely be rejected or substantially revised. Marx himself was not dogmatic; and in his writings the concepts of alienation and reification may constitute a more viable approach to analysing literary works than those employed by Plekhanov and Lukács. There is, too, the concept of dissociation which both Engels and Lukács have developed, that between the author's own ideology and the world he depicts artistically there may exist a contradiction. In Balzac and in Tolstoy the most reactionary ideas coexist with a realistic portrayal of contemporary society, their imagination seemingly correcting ideological illusions. The latent tension between prior intent and truthful portrayal of reality may well provide an important clue to the structure of a literary work.

With this in mind, we can now examine the most recent attempts to go beyond the mechanical, external, and frequently reductionist approach of positivism and Marxism, an approach which above all concentrates on the literary work itself as *literature*.

3 Literature and Structuralism

At the end of the nineteenth century the dominant tendency in literary criticism, shared by bourgeois writers and Marxists like Plekhanov, was positivism. In the work of Taine, Brandes, and Plekhanov, literary analysis worked away from the literary text itself focusing attention on *extrinsic* factors, which were held to determine its mode of existence, and by implication facilitate the *understanding* of the work. Literature was thus a mere epiphenomenon of the social structure, a reflection either of the author's life or his times. Literature was explained away; literary creativity was held to be no more than the end product of an external, determinate causality. Historical and social backgrounds and not the literary text became the focus of interest and point of departure for analysis; literature was effectively dissolved in the face of such determining factors as race, milieu, class forces, and personal biography.*

This crude reductionism produced two important responses: the structural analysis of the Russian Formalists and the Prague Linguistic Circle, and a much more flexible Marxism inspired by the early work of Lukács and most recently by Lucien Goldmann. Structuralism, one of the key terms in social science today, is the common approach of these two different perspectives.

1

Russian Formalism arose as an attempt to reinstate the literary text as the only viable unit of criticism.† The main task of

* For a useful discussion of these tendencies, see R. Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1963, especially the essay 'The Revolt against Positivism in Recent European Scholarship'.

† The Formalist school developed between about 1913 and 1930, when it was officially disbanded by Stalin as a form of 'bourgeois ideology'. The

literary criticism, they argued, lay not so much in studying literature but its 'literariness'. Art was a self-enclosed system and if sociological factors exercised any influence they did so indirectly.* Formalist criticism aimed to establish an independent science of literature in which literature had the status of an autonomous cultural object. The mirror image was wholly rejected, since literature does not passively reflect social life but rather creatively distorts it through the use of specific literary devices. The 'artistic device' became the Formalists' major critical concern. They argued that each device existed within an 'aesthetic system' where it performed specific functions. Devices of plot, narrative, and technique existed independently of external factors, constituting what one Formalist called the 'self-determined use of material'.† Their emphasis was on literature as a system, a literary totality in which all the constituent parts added up to a coherent whole. Style was one of the main elements in the *dynamic* integration of the system, and the duty of the critic lay in determining 'the specific function of the artistic device in each particular case'. Devices thus functioned within a unified whole which was the literary text.‡

leading theorists were Shklovsky, Tomashevsky, Eichenbaum, and Roman Jakobson (who left Russia in 1921 and helped found the Prague Linguistic Circle). Some of their essays have been translated by L. T. Lemon and M. J. Reiss in *Russian Formalist Criticism*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1965. On the history of the Formalist school, see especially V. Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, The Hague, Mouton, 1955.

* In their early writings, the Formalists argued that art was totally self-enclosed, but they gradually modified this extreme formulation to include some external factors. Tomashevsky argued that a theme can only survive if it carries an external reference, an external appeal (Lemon and Reiss, pp. 61–4).

† This interior approach to literary analysis is summed up by Shklovsky: 'The form of a work of art is defined by its relation to other works of art, to forms existing prior to it . . . The purpose of any new form is not to express new content, but to change an old form which has lost its aesthetic quality' (Lemon and Reiss, op. cit.).

‡ The Formalists were soon under attack from Marxism for their radical non-sociological approach. Lunacharsky suggested that Formalism was a 'cultural survivor' from pre-Revolutionary Russia, 'escapism', 'a decadent ideology'. On the other hand Trotsky agreed with the Formalists that the ultimate judgement of any literary text must be based on its literary qualities, that art has its own laws, and that Marxist sociology cannot pass aesthetic judgement. He disagreed, however, on the question of origins, that the appearance of a particular type of novel could only be explained causally,

The importance of the Formalists' analysis clearly lies in their emphasis on the specific 'aesthetic' qualities of literature, and in grasping literary works as integrated wholes. In their analysis the devices act to create a dynamic unity, 'an unfolding dynamic whole'. There is here a close kinship between the work of the Swiss linguist Saussure and the Formalists, especially with Saussure's concept of system and the Formalists' notion of the functional significance of devices. As one Formalist wrote, anticipating in many ways the Prague Circle's concept of aesthetic structure as a dynamic system of signs, 'the constructive function of each component of the system lies in its relatedness to other components and, *eo ipso*, to the entire system'. In his posthumously published *Course in General Linguistics* (1915), Saussure had drawn an important distinction between language* as it exists at a particular moment ('synchronic') and as it develops through time ('diachronic'). Saussure was mainly concerned in developing what he called the science of semiology – the study of 'the life of signs within society', of which language was one part. Saussure went on to argue that language was a social institution, external to man with its linguistic system (its 'code') pre-existing the individual act of speech, the 'message'. Thus the emphasis on the need to study the system of communication between the 'signified' and the 'signifier', two aspects of a code which everyone uses. Saussure argued strongly for the synchronic study of language, and in the structuralism which has largely developed from Saussure's concepts, the notion of system is all important; but it is a system at a given moment, and in this sense structuralism tends to be ahistorical and non-genetic.†

Structuralism, has, however, many meanings, but in its most general sense it employs the crucial concept of system, whether it is linguistic, literary, or social,‡ in which the element

that is, sociologically. See L. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, New York, Russell & Russell, 1957, ch. 5.

* Saussure distinguished between *la langue* and *la parole*, between the external public language which is used as a code by everyone, and the personal use made of it by individuals.

† Cf. R. Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1967.

‡ Thus in C. Lévi-Strauss's analysis of kinship, the law which governs the exchange of women in certain societies in seen as a universal order covering all kinship systems independently of those individuals who constitute it (*Structural Anthropology*, London, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1968.)

under analysis forms numerous dynamic relations with other elements, with the other parts of the system, and where every element has a meaning only in relation to the other parts. Fundamentally it is holistic and integrative, implying a fluid relationship between the parts and the whole. But there is an important difference between the proponents of historical and non-historical structuralism. An emphasis on the synchronic aspects of a system frequently leads structuralist studies to minute concentration on details at the expense of the system's *development outside itself*. In his criticisms of the Formalists, Trotsky had drawn attention to their 'excessive one-sidedness' in ignoring the actual sociological environment of the literary work, an environment which is pre-eminently human and therefore historical.* In fact the Formalists modified their extreme position to some extent, Tomashevsky writing that if a 'verbal structure' was to be coherent it must possess a unifying theme which was not self-contained, since the survival of any literary work depends on the choice of themes, whether they are significant or insignificant to man himself. Tomashevsky thus implied a connection between the intrinsic and the extrinsic dimensions of literature – it is only through enlarging the limits of realism that the writer actually reaches 'general human interests' of love and death, for the merely topical does not survive.†

A-historical structuralism, then, must be distinguished from historical structuralism, that is, from a method which conceives the text under analysis as 'historically specific' and explicable both in terms of its inner structure and its external history, the social, political, and economic environment which produced it. From the point of view of the sociology of literature, structuralism pinpoints the literary work as a basic datum of research, seeing it as 'a layered system of meanings' which add up to an integrated whole and which is closely related, but not wholly determined, by external factors. Thus for Goldmann works of literature must be grasped pre-eminently as 'wholes' – what he terms 'significant wholes' – in which the various parts function only as elements of a literary and social totality. His argument is that all great literary and philosophical works have

* Trotsky, op. cit.

† Lemon and Reiss, op. cit., pp. 63–5.

a total coherence and that the structures which make up the texts have a meaning only in so far as they give 'a complete and coherent picture of the overall meaning of the work'.

Let us now briefly examine Goldmann's method.

2

Goldmann's approach to the sociology of literature is highly idiosyncratic, fusing structural analysis with historical and dialectical materialism.* It is important to note that while Goldmann develops a specifically Marxist theory, many of his key concepts and much of his inspiration derive from the early pre-Marxist writings of Lukács.† Under strong pressure from the Communist Party, which demanded rigid orthodoxy in all matters of theory, Lukács was forced to repudiate these early works, especially the collection of essays he published in 1923. In these he claimed Marxism as pre-eminently a method, not a dogmatic set of truths handed down from Marx, and thus subject to continual revision in the light of changing experience, a 'critical' as well as scientific theory of society, employing the concepts of alienation and reification. Lukács demonstrated, long before the actual publication of Marx's early writings, the centrality to Marx's thought of these categories which in the writings of Plekhanov and Engels had been largely forgotten. But his most important concept, one which Goldmann has carried over into his sociology, is that of 'totality', a concept which, like those of alienation and reification, had been ignored by orthodox Marxism.

* Goldmann's most important writings in the sociology of literature are as follows: *The Hidden God* (1956), trans. P. Thody, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964; *Pour une sociologie du Roman*, Paris, Gallimard, 1965; 'The Sociology of Literature: Status and Problems of Method', *International Social Science Journal*, vol. XIX, no. 4, 1967; 'Criticism and Dogmatism in Literature', in D. Cooper (ed.), *The Dialectics of Liberation*, London, Penguin Books, 1968. For his general sociological method, see *The Human Sciences and Philosophy* (1952), London, Jonathan Cape, 1969; *Recherches Dialectiques*, Paris, Gallimard, 1959.

† Georg Lukács (born 1885) is mainly known for his explicit Marxist writings, which were discussed in the previous chapter. The most important of the early writings are *The Theory of the Novel* (1914–16) and *History and Class Consciousness* (1919–23). For Goldmann's discussion of these texts, see his essay, 'Introduction aux premiers écrits de Georges Lukács', appended to the French translation of the *Theory of the Novel* (*La Théorie du Roman*, Paris, Gonthier, 1968).

For Lukács, it was not 'the predominance of economic motives in the interpretation of society which is the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois science, but rather the point of view of totality. The . . . domination of the whole over the part is the essence of the method which Marx took over from Hegel and . . . transformed into the basis of an entirely new science.'* In his Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* (1857), Marx had argued that society constituted a totality of *concrete* historical conditions, relations, and values, and that the task of science was to begin with the constituent parts, simple conceptions such as division of work, labour, exchange (abstractions from the whole), and gradually work up to the whole so that 'the abstract definitions lead to the reproduction of the concrete subject (society) in the course of reasoning'.† Scientific analysis must always proceed from the abstract to the concrete, from the individual part to the whole, the method being a continual oscillation between abstractions and what Marx called the 'pre-given, living concrete whole'.

Literature, like society, is a totality, each literary work a living whole which can only be understood in terms of its constituent parts. Lukács uses the concept, 'significant dynamic structure' to refer to philosophical and literary works that are totalities of thought and experience. As products of a constantly changing social world they are dynamic rather than static entities and significant for embodying the crucial values and events of their time. Thus two of Lukács's dynamic structures, tragedy and the novel, total complexes of thought about the world and man's position within it, are related concretely by Goldmann in his research to specific social, economic, and political structure. The early work of Lukács had analysed these structures idealistically, as 'atemporal essences' which transcended social structure.‡

* G. Lukács, *Histoire et Conscience de Classe*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1960.

† K. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, New York, Charles Kerr, 1904.

‡ In Lukács's early writing a significant dynamic structure is called a 'form' (novel, tragedy), and, having absorbed the concepts of 'atemporal essence' and 'significance' from the German idealist philosopher, Dilthey (1833–1911), he arrived at his 'significant, atemporal structure'. Lukács, of course, was writing in the wake of that 'revolt against positivism' which characterized

From Lukács, too, Goldmann derives his concept of the world vision (*'vision du monde'*) which, he argues, all great philosophical and literary work embodies, investing them with internal coherence and external 'validity'. A world vision is defined as 'a significant global structure', a total comprehension of the world which attempts to grasp its meaning in all its complexity and wholeness.

> What I have called a 'world vision' is a convenient term for the whole complex of ideas, aspirations and feelings which links together the members of a social group (a group which, in most cases, assumes the existence of a social class) and which opposes them to members of other social groups. This is . . . a tendency which really exists among the members of a certain social group, who all attain this class consciousness in a more or less coherent manner . . . In a few cases – and it is these which interest us – there are exceptional individuals who either actually achieve or who come very near to achieving a completely integrated and coherent view of what they and the social class to which they belong are trying to do. The men who express this vision on an imaginative or conceptual plane are writers and philosophers, and the more closely their work expresses this vision in its complete and integrated form, the more important does it become. They then achieve the maximum possible awareness of the social group whose nature they are expressing.*

In the absence of a fully worked out typology of world visions, Goldmann suggests as examples empiricism, rationalism, and the tragic vision – total complexes of thought in which reality is grasped as a *whole*; moreover, world visions are forms of consciousness closely bound up with social classes – a world vision is always a vision of a social class.

An obvious objection to this conception of world vision is that it is no more than an ideology. However, Goldmann argues, the essence of an ideology lies in its partial, one-sided view of the world, in its falsity, a distorting rather than 'true' picture

early twentieth-century literary and philosophical discussions, culminating in Russian Formalism and structuralism. In sociology, the German sociologist Max Weber (1870–1920), who had some influence on Lukács, argued against the positivistic tenet that social science and natural science share an identical methodology, postulating instead the centrality to sociology of the concepts of 'understanding' and 'significance'. See especially M. Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, New York, Macmillan, 1949, and more generally, H. S. Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, New York, Knopf, 1958, chs 2 and 8.

* Goldmann, *The Hidden God*, p. 17.

of reality; Marx and Engels in fact called all ideologies 'false consciousness', implying that 'true consciousness' was possible but only if the world was seen as a whole. This is not to suggest that absolute truth exists, only that at particular historical moments man attempts to understand the world as a whole and this vision, embodied in literature and philosophy, is true for him and his class. Thus Adam Smith in his analysis of commercial capitalism used the method of empiricism to show how the bourgeois society which was then emerging was historically the end of history – he could not understand that *its* negation was the industrial working class, then undeveloped, and that only Marxism would embody this truth later in the next century. For Smith conflict ceased at the threshold of bourgeois society; for Marx class conflict was the basic fact of bourgeois, capitalist society. In other words, empiricism passed into ideology because it failed to account for a world characterized by social conflict and rapid social change.*

A further difficulty arises over the precise nature of a world vision. Goldmann states that it is not 'an immediate empirical fact' but rather a structure of ideas, aspirations, and feelings which serves to unite a social group *vis-à-vis* other social groups. A world vision is therefore an abstraction; it achieves its concrete form in certain literary and philosophical texts. World visions are not 'facts', have no objective existence of their own, but merely exist as theoretical expressions of the real conditions and interests of determinate social strata. Goldmann in fact calls world visions a form of 'collective group consciousness' which function as a kind of cement, binding individuals together as a group, giving them a collective identity. World visions are, moreover, not only the expression of a social group but of social class also. Why class? Because, argues Goldmann, the most important social group to which a writer can belong is a social class, since it is through a class that he is linked with major social and political change.

> Up to the present day, it is class, linked together with basic economic needs, which has been of prime importance in influencing the ideo-

* Following Lukács, Goldmann argues that Marxism is truer than bourgeois science simply because in the bourgeois period only the working class have a need to understand the real movement of capitalist society, for they are the only class capable of effecting the transition from capitalism to socialism.

logical life of man, since he has been compelled to devote most of his thought and energy either to finding enough to live on or, if he belonged to a ruling class, to keeping his privileges and administering and increasing his wealth.*

Social and political change is, for the Marxist, the expression of class antagonism and clearly impinges on class consciousness. No articulate member of a social class can be ignorant of, or indifferent to, major social and political change. His class affiliations sharpen his consciousness of the world and drive him to express, however obliquely, the significant social tendencies of his period in a literary or philosophical medium. World visions are thus the theoretical expressions of social classes at particular historical moments, and the writer, philosopher, or artist articulates this consciousness.

Goldmann makes extravagant claims for his concept. A world vision, he writes, will enable the researcher to separate the accidental from the essential features of a work and to focus on the text as a significant whole. This latter point leads him to make the usual distinction between the 'great' and the 'inferior' writers, arguing that only a great writer's work will have an internal coherence constituting a significant whole. This distinction is based on *internal* criteria and not on external factors as in Taine and Plekhanov, for what Goldmann is arguing here is that the internal coherence of a particular literary work depends exclusively on the world vision held by the writer. The concept allows the researcher to grasp fully this inner coherent structure. It should be noted that Goldmann is not claiming sovereignty over traditional literary criticism, for the world vision does not supplant aesthetic judgement of style, imagery, syntax, etc., but merely acts as the main methodological tool in the *understanding* of the *whole text*.†

A world vision, then, determines the internal structure of a text. What Goldmann calls 'valid literary works' are thus characterized by an inner coherence which allows them to express a 'true universe', and a 'rigorous and unified genre'. The question

* Goldmann, op. cit., pp. 17–18.

† This is not at all clear. After all, to explain and to understand the whole text, or even the 95 per cent minimum which Goldmann claims for his method, is surely to dismiss or at least relegate traditional aesthetics to a very minor status – as supportive to a sociological hegemony? On this question, see chapter 4 below.

of what actually constitutes a valid literary work brings Goldmann close to traditional literary criticism and to positivism. For Goldmann, a valid literary work is one which expresses the basic and universal human condition:

A philosophy or work of art can keep its value outside the time and place where it first appeared only if, by expressing a particular human condition, it transposes this on to a plane of the great human problems created by man's relationship with his fellows and with the universe.*

The mediocre writer merely reflects the historical period and his work has only documentary value. But great literature tackles the major problems and it achieves its inner unity because only the 'exceptional individual', the truly great writer, identifies with the fundamental social tendencies of his time in a way which allows him to achieve coherent expression of reality – the average writer, the average member of a group, will also grasp the social tendencies but in a confused and vague manner. What Goldmann seems to be saying is that only good sociological-cum-philosophical literature is worth studying, since it is only within these texts that a world vision is expressed, based on the human condition and an exceptional awareness of major social trends.

These, then, are Goldmann's main terms. It is important to see the manner of application in concrete research. His method, which he calls 'generalized genetic structuralism' (historical structuralism) seeks firstly to identify certain structures within particular texts, and secondly, to relate them to concrete historical and social conditions, to a social group and social class associated with the writer and to the world vision of that class. The emphasis throughout is on the text itself as a whole and on history as a process. Goldmann's approach is to extrapolate from the social group and the text under analysis an abstraction, that is, a world vision, which then becomes a working model. He returns to the texts seeking to explain the whole, that is, their structures, by reference to his model. In essence the method is a continual oscillation between texts, social structure (social groups and classes), and the model, between abstractions and the concrete, Marx's 'pre-given, living, concrete whole'. Thus, in

* Goldmann, op. cit., p. 20.

his analysis of the philosophy of Pascal and the plays of Racine, Goldmann is able to connect the tragic vision which these works express with an extreme religious social group, the Jansenists, and a social class, the *Noblesse de Robe*. 'Outstanding cultural events', he argues, such as Pascal's *Pensées*, are rarely linked with insignificant social changes; he is able to demonstrate how the shifting balance of power in seventeenth-century France between the Court, the Church, the aristocracy, and the Third Estate gave rise both to an extreme form of Jansenism and to a tragic vision of the world.*

Goldmann's concrete research has always been problem-oriented. His study of Pascal set out initially to explore the reasons for Pascal's transition from a philosophically optimistic point of view, in his *Provincial Letters* (1657), to the far greater philosophical speculation in his pessimistic *Pensées* (1662). Similarly, in his study of the French novelist André Malraux, the problem lay in explaining the 'qualitative' change from the early allegorical fantasies (1920–23)† to the great novels of China (1928–33).‡ In both cases the answer is a world vision.

3

In *The Hidden God*, Goldmann shows that the philosophy of Pascal and the theatre of Racine constituted the theoretical expression of a 'marginal' social group, the Jansenists, and a 'marginal' social class, the *Noblesse de Robe*. Both Pascal and Racine express a tragic view of life, what Goldmann calls the 'tragedy of refusal', that is, a rejection of the world coupled with a desire to remain within it and thus not a retreat to some form of other-worldliness, such as mysticism.§ Pascal's *Pensées* are

* For Goldmann's concept of world vision, see especially *The Hidden God*, ch. 5.

† *Royaume Farfelu* (1920), *Lunes en Papier* (1921), *La Tention de l'Occident* (1923).

‡ *Les Conquerants* (1928), *La Voie Royale* (1930), *La Condition Humaine* (1933).

§ Goldmann derives his concept of tragedy from Lukács in his *The Soul and the Form* (1908), although, of course, providing it with a socio-economic base. The extreme form of Jansenism with which both Pascal and Racine were involved was that developed by a sect known as 'The Friends of Port-Royal'. See Goldmann, op. cit., especially pp. 142–50.

characterized by this extreme position: the world is no longer in harmony with God and man, for although God is not absent from the world, he is silent, he is hidden; in order for man to live, therefore, he must 'wager', man must gamble on God's existence and thus on his own salvation.

This tragic vision, argues Goldmann, could only have occurred at a particular historical moment. All forms of tragic thought share a common characteristic, for they all 'express a deep crisis in the relationship between man and his social and spiritual world'. The crisis of the social world lay in the inability of the emerging bourgeois groups, the *Noblesse de Robe*, to break royal absolutism and its centralized state bureaucracy and thus develop capitalist society. Goldmann succeeds in showing how the extreme Jansenist creed, 'a refusal both of the world and of any desire to change it historically', was bound up closely with the social discontent of the *Noblesse de Robe*. Originally recruited from the Third Estate and ennobled by the monarch to form part of the administrative structure of the state bureaucracy, the *Noblesse de Robe* constituted a deliberate counterweight to the power of the traditional aristocracy, the *Noblesse de Cour*. But with the consolidation of the Crown and thus the absolutist state, the *Noblesse de Robe's* power and prestige waned considerably although it remained tied to the Crown economically. Goldmann suggests that this highly ambiguous position, entailing both opposition to and need for the Crown, produced a philosophy and a literature dominated by a tragic outlook: a bourgeoisie which was in opposition to and economically independent of the monarchy would have developed a more *active*, worldly philosophy, rationalism, and empiricism, as indeed occurred in the eighteenth century.*

The concept of the tragic vision, then, enables Goldmann to

* Goldmann makes the interesting observation that while Pascal's texts show an awareness of the dialectical character of the world, its contradictory nature, its oppositions, and its essential flux, his social link with extreme Jansenism, through the politically impotent *Noblesse de Robe*, prevented him from extending his pristine dialectical understanding in favour of a wholly tragic outlook in which change in the world by man himself was impossible. During the next century, Hegel, and in the nineteenth century, Marx, would extend the dialectical understanding to social life and thus provide a *social* solution to what appeared to Pascal as a situation of ineluctable pessimism and tragedy.

explain the shift between the 'moderate' philosophical position occupied by Pascal in his *Provincial Letters* and the tragic extremism of the *Pensées*: it was in no sense a question of individual psychology but rather the development of a particular, historically specific world vision. World visions appear thus as the key to literary history. We would expect, therefore, great novelists to express world visions in their work since without it, on Goldmann's terms, their novels would lack coherence, validity, and so on. But there is a difference between philosophy as expressed by Pascal, written at a high conceptual level, where one might reasonably expect to find world visions, and the novel form which, apart from its concreteness and particularity of detail, incident, and character, has almost overridingly been concerned with the 'private life' of its protagonists. There is, too, the question of audience: novels are written usually for specific markets in which they have to sell. Frequently the writer is a professional author unsupported by religious, political, or court patronage and the history of the novel as a genre parallels the writers' growing emancipation, from a servile and unstable literary fealty, to the status of a 'free-floating intellectual'.* More particularly it raises the question of the writer's social position within a classs or group, as well as his relations with the dominant class. One reason why modern literature is often termed 'problematic' is that the writer no longer expresses the vision or views of a particular social class.

Goldmann's definition of the writer's function as 'one of criticial opposition . . . a form of resistance to the ongoing development of bourgeois society' brings us to the crucial problem: for if the novelist embodies this critical consciousness, then he is most unlikely to express through his work an abhorrent class consciousness. Similarly, he is unlikely to be part of the working class, since most writers originate and remain within a middle-class environment and rarely identify with a social class they hardly *know*.† The utility of the concept of world vision as the master key to world literature is surely

* Many contemporary novelists, for example, find employment in the academic world more congenial than living off their own writing, especially the Americans, for example, Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, John Barth.

† Many writers have identified with the working class through the Communist Party but few have created works of enduring literary value.

challenged by the writer's ambiguous class position after the revolutions of 1848, when, with the European bourgeoisie as the dominant class, it became progressively more difficult for the writer to be both critical and enthusiastic for bourgeois values. Flaubert typifies this increasing social alienation in his hatred of both bourgeoisie and proletariat, in his conception of the writer as an impartial spectator withdrawing from active participation in the society he depicts artistically.

In his discussion of the problems of the sociology of the novel,* Goldmann is clearly aware of these difficulties. There is nothing surprising, he argues, about the development of the novel as a literary genre, since it embodies, above all else, a search for values in a world emptied of 'authenticity', a world 'degraded' and dominated not by human but by exchange ('use') values.† Lukács, in his *Theory of the Novel* had argued that the novel (the romanesque form – a significant structure) was characterized essentially by a radical antagonism between the hero and the world. Unlike the hero in Greek epic, he does not enjoy an organic and living relation with his society but is 'set free' to work out his own destiny through his own efforts within a wholly secular world. But as hero he is bound not to the conventional values of the empirical world but rather to 'authentic' values, and thus the novel becomes a quest for authenticity in a world where authentic values remain implicit. The novel is a 'literary form of absence' with the hero searching hopelessly for values which constantly elude him, and it is the problematic character of these values which leads ultimately to the novel form.‡

Goldmann extends Lukács's idealized, wholly internal interpretation to the socio-economic sphere: the novel form develops as a result of class development and he proposes a 'rigorous homology' between economic and literary structures. The novel is fundamentally to do with man's alienation from the social world; it is the artistic expression of a society in which money takes precedence over man, and where man is degraded to the

* Goldmann, *Pour une Sociologie du Roman*, pp. 19–58.

† Goldmann employs the categories of the young Marx, for whom the increase in economic values was paralleled by a constant devaluation of human life.

‡ Lukács, *Théorie du Roman*, part 1. See also P. Mann, 'Lukács' Theory of the Novel', *Modern Language Notes*, December 1966; Demetz, op. cit., ch. 8.

status of an 'object' in that his labour, his essence, is defined as a commodity to be bought on the market by the highest available bidder. But this definition leads to a problem: for if great art is wholly the expression of the world vision of a social class, then the novel must constitute, in its origins and development, the vision of the bourgeoisie against whom the hero must be in opposition. In other words, the 'problematic hero' must draw his inspiration from his opposition to the 'collective consciousness' of the bourgeoisie.* Goldmann's answer is to argue that since no social group can 'effectively defend' capitalist 'exploitation', or at least can do so only through ideology, through the distortion of truth, then great literature ceases to be bound up exclusively with the fate of social classes. Capitalism, he suggests, has succeeded not merely in 'degrading' the world but in transposing directly its economic activity into mental life: 'In market geared societies the collective consciousness progressively loses all sense of active reality and tends to become a simple reflection of economic life.'† It is not, however, an automatic, mechanical adjustment: Marx developed his theory of alienation in the 1840s but it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that it became part of imaginative literature. In the novels of Robbe-Grillet especially, Goldmann claims to find the reified consciousness of modern man.

Thus Goldmann suggests that a direct causal link exists between the forms of the modern novel and *society as a whole*. Indeed, he goes further, arguing for a similarly direct relation between the novel and particular phases of capitalist development. He describes three broad historical periods, beginning in 1880, and ending with the present time. The first period, corresponding to the growth of cartels and monopolies and colonial expansion (1880–1914), is reflected in the decline of the hero within the novel; between 1918 and 1939, the period of 'crisis capitalism', the hero more or less disappears from the novel, a process which 'consumer capitalism', 1945 onwards, completes. Goldmann, then, is suggesting that social class as the focal point of genuine literary creativity becomes relatively unimportant, and that society as a whole, especially its economic

* Cf. E. Knight, *A Theory of the Classical Novel*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, pp. 55–6.
† Goldmann, *Pour une Sociologie du Roman*.

structure, is the determining factor. And, if he is to be wholly consistent with his stated method, there is the further problem that on his own terms the only genuine world vision which can find expression in an advanced capitalist society must be that of Marxism, given the world vision's oppositional character – all else must surely be mere ideology, sheer perspective.* How does Goldmann deal with these problems in his study of the novels of André Malraux?

Malraux's fiction falls into three distinct phases, beginning with the three allegorical fantasies written in the early twenties, and ending with the philosophically pessimistic *Walnut Trees of Altenburg* (1943). In between lies the great creative period embracing the novels of the Chinese and Spanish civil wars, *Man's Estate* and *Days of Hope*.† Goldmann argues that it is in this second stage that Malrux creates a genuine novel form (*'une structure proprement romanesque'*). His early fiction had been written as satirical allegory, expressive of a pessimistic philosophy shared by many European intellectuals after the First World War, feelings which attest to the crisis of individualistic values in an increasingly collectivist society. These early stories indicate a remarkable talent, but no more. They do not explain Malraux's sudden transition to the truly great novels of his middle period; if it was merely a question of increasing technical competence then his development would have been more gradual. The sudden 'qualitative' change is explicable only in terms of the values which govern the novels' fictional universe. Malraux, argues Goldmann, embraced 'universal values' although of a 'problematic character'. For Goldmann, then, following Lukács's argument that the novel is a structure held together aesthetically by 'problematic values', it is Malraux's acceptance of the world vision of communism which provides the authentic values necessary for the creation of a 'rigorous and unified genre' – the novel form.‡ Goldmann's

* Goldmann has in fact stated that the Marxist analysis is no longer applicable to advanced, consumer capitalism, in which the working class has been assimilated and is thus no longer a revolutionary class. He appears to believe in a form of evolution rather than revolution, involving technical workers rather than the proletariat as the main agencies of change as understood in classical Marxist theory.
† *La Condition Humaine*, 1933; *L'Espoir*, 1937.
‡ The suggestion of Knight, op. cit., that Goldmann's theory only applies to the picaresque novel form, is wholly inadmissible – the quest for values is

method is to work through the novels and show how the waxing and waning of the authentic values parallels the emergence and the decline of a genuine novel.*

In *Man's Estate*, usually regarded as Malraux's greatest work, the orientation is 'towards the replacement of individual heroes by the collective personality'. In this novel Malraux portrays the conflict which developed between a group of Chinese communists situated in Shanghai, dedicated to proletarian revolution, and the representatives of the Russian Communist Party who advocated joint action with the national bourgeoisie led by Chiang Kai-shek. The novel sketches the relation between the 'problematic community' of revolutionary communists, problematic because their values and actions were challenging capitalist society, and the Stalinist policies of the Chinese Communist Party which eventually doomed the revolutionaries to defeat and death. As long as Malraux was critical of the policies followed by the official communist leadership he could create a novel of 'authentic values', although one in which the hero has been replaced by the community. In the later *Days of Hope*, when Malraux had come to accept uncritically the policies of international communism it was impossible for him to depict any kind of 'authenticity'.

Goldmann's argument is that a coherent structure is dependent on the 'global vision' expressed in a novel and its resultant values. Thus in *Man's Estate* the world vision of communism enables Malraux to depict love between men and women only where the characters are organically connected with a community; in *Days of Hope*, a novel which has neither problematic hero nor problematic community, love, eroticism, family life, are portrayed as *obstacles* to the disciplined direction and success of the Communist Party. Structure and value are closely bound: the values of the revolutionary community in *Man's Estate* are compared with the value of discipline in *Days of Hope* in a way which suggests that human values, love, and the human community are possible only if a *problematic* dimension of some kind is present. In *Days of Hope* there is none, only the Communist

not identical with a roving hero but is implied in the very act of human participation within society.

* Cf. H. Levin, 'Toward a Sociology of the Novel', in *Refractions*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1966.

Party, disciplined and dogmatic, with its 'correct political line' opposed to any spontaneous revolutionary action.* In *Man's Estate*, Malraux had not yet wholly identified with the Communist Party, and thus the 'fundamental values which structured the universe' of the novel were different from those of the Party. Thus the fluctuations of 'authentic' and 'non-authentic' values within Malraux's fiction flowed directly from his awareness of the world vision of communism, pre-Stalinist and post-Stalinist. His final novel, *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg*, completes Malraux's journey, from pessimistic satire through Marxism to Stalinism and finally to this series of dialogues which propose as a solution to the world's problems an efficient and trained élite which would be both privileged and cultivated. This wholly conceptual structure with no heroes or community clearly points the way for Malraux's years with de Gaulle in post-war France.

It should be clear from this brief discussion of Goldmann's analysis of Malraux's fiction that the link between the novels, social groups, social class, and world vision seems the simple one of critical fraternity with communism producing 'authentic values', while a dogmatic relation yields only a non-problematic and 'non-authentic' fictional universe. But what precisely was Malraux's relationship with communism and therefore with the working class whose vision he expresses? Goldmann is unclear: were Malraux's communist affiliations between 1926 and 1937 an individual phenomenon, or an expression of a more general commitment by certain groups of French intellectuals towards the Russian Revolution and thus to Marxism and the working class? There is, too, the question of ideology. If the world vision of Marxism provides the inner unity of *Man's Estate*, what of the vision expressed in the Stalinist *Days of Hope*, for here the Spanish Civil War is depicted in purely technical and military terms, not as a problem of policy and values. The absence of any kind of problematic element implies not a world vision but rather an ideology – in this case, Stalinism. Thus it seems that a world vision becomes an ideology in a writer's own time.

Many of these problems remain unanswered in Goldmann's brief discussion of the *Nouveau Roman*.* The novels of Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute fit perfectly into his schema of the modern novel; as realistic novels their literary structures are

* Goldmann, *Pour une sociologie du Roman*, pp. 156–60, 220–22.

in every way analogous to the social reality of consumer capitalism. The hero and the human community have been eclipsed totally by a world of objects, and external things that now dominate man. Objects in the classical novel existed merely in terms of their relations with individual characters; but in the new novel, with its origins in Joyce, Kafka, Musil, they take on the appearance of autonomy, having their own structure and laws but at the same time expressing 'in a certain measure human reality'. Thus, in Robbe-Grillet's *Le Voyeur*, man is depicted as essentially passive, a spectator living in a world of other 'indifferent onlookers', thus reflecting 'one of the fundamental facts of contemporary industrial societies', man's complete lack of initiative.* Man is an object, dominated by economic and social self-regulation; the world is a hostile, alien place, where individuals have neither the wish to intervene, to act positively, nor to transform life qualitatively. These writings, argues Goldmann, carry 'a realistic, critical, and perfectly coherent vision of contemporary society' and constitute 'valid and authentic literary works'.‡

This seems a strange conclusion: world visions by definition strive towards totality, to grasp the whole: the trend of contemporary fiction (and this applies with force to Robbe-Grillet and the practitioners of the new novel) is away from literary totalities towards a wholly private, individual, subjective world – a *partial* rather than total view. But Goldmann raises more questions about the sociological study of literature than he provides solutions. In the next chapter we shall examine more critically Goldmann's major concepts and general theory, and attempt to relate them to the problem of method in cultural analysis.

* ibid., pp. 279–334.
† Goldmann, *Criticism and Dogmatism in Literature*, p. 147.
‡ ibid.

4 Problems of Method

In the preceding chapters we have tried to sketch the main tendencies in the sociological study of literature, noting some of their similarities and differences. A somewhat schematic differentiation was suggested between the tendency to see literature as largely a reflection of the socio-economic process, as in positivism, and the more critical, internal perspective of structuralism. Both perspectives conform with Taine's comment that books do not drop from the sky like meteorites* but have their basis in a specific social context which can be analysed sociologically. The positivistic method, however, leads to a relative lack of concern with literary texts ('reductionism') while structuralism makes the text the centre of research. We have, then, two fairly distinct lines of sociological inquiry: first, a sociology of literature which begins with milieu and works outwards, seeking to relate literature to purely external factors through their reflection or refraction in the text – its method is to elucidate the social correlates of literature at a certain moment in its production (Taine, Plekhanov); secondly, a literary sociology with its basis in the literary text, which relates structures to genre and society.

There is here a difference both in terms of method and general emphasis. Goldmann's work, for example, is painstaking in its search for the social conditions underpinning literary creativity, but his starting point is the literary text itself. His method does not 'dissolve' literature into its surrounding environment or make it a simple function of class consciousness. Yet within Goldmann's work there are positivistic tendencies and a conception of the novel, for example, as a *reflection* of society, especially in his analysis of Robbe-Grillet and in his homology of structures in which literature *reflects* the dominant elements

* Quoted in Levin, *The Gates of Horn*, p. 9.

of capitalism (its three phases). The emphasis in this approach clearly undermines the possibility both of an autonomous literary sector as Engels suggested, as well as seeming to ignore the importance of literary tradition in shaping an artist's consciousness. Every writer works within a tradition, an inherited literary culture, and his own work will show in various ways the influence of this background; writers are influenced too by the other cultural traditions, especially philosophy and politics. The important point is not the tracing of 'influences' in an abstract manner but studying the ways in which a particular writer absorbs a tradition and from it develops his own authentic voice, his ideas, his view of man, for what he creates from preceding influences will be one of the most significant clues to a complete understanding of his work: the elements of antecedent tradition which are accepted or rejected, developed, modified, or simply left unchanged will reflect in some measure the changes which have occurred in the social structure.* The Russian Formalist, Shklovsky posed this question idealistically when he wrote that 'the form of a work of art is defined by its relation to other works of art, to forms existing prior to it . . . The purpose of any new form is not to express new content, but to change an old form which has lost its aesthetic quality.'† In this formulation Shklovsky is close to the nineteenth-century French critic Ferdinand Brunetière, who argued for an autonomous evolution of genres in which, of all the influences on literature, the most important was that of literature itself, 'work on work'. The number of causes, he argued, should not be increased on the assumption that literature expressed society, nor should the history of literature be confused with the history of 'morals and manners'.‡ But since literature is about man living within a specific social context it can hardly be discussed independently of society: Zola's social reportage type of novel was

* For example, in Flaubert's historical novel, *Salammbo*, the characters are invested with a nineteenth-century psychology – Salammbo herself is another Madame Bovary sharing her hysterical longings and torments. In Scott's novels, on the other hand, the psychological presentation of character is on the same level of historical development as the period depicted. Lukács links this change, and others such as the excessive attention to brutality in Flaubert's novel, to the development of a fully bourgeois capitalism (*The Historical Novel*, pp. 188–99).

† Lemon and Reiss, op. cit.

‡ See R. Wellek, *History of Modern Criticism*, vol. 4, pp. 58–71.

written from a realistic perspective and in this sense he follows the tradition of Balzac, but his concept of the author as observer, as someone who is not involved in the process he is describing, can only be understood in terms of the changes which had occurred in French society between 1830 and 1880 – the writer as spectator is explicable as a function of increasing marginality and the uncertainty of intellectuals who could no longer easily identify their basic assumptions with the dominant class.

The influence of literature on literature must be considered and integrated into the method of the sociology of literature. It raises the question of how conscious the writer himself is of writing both within a specific literary tradition and in a specific type of society. Fielding was clearly aware of his debt to the seventeenth-century picaresque tradition, as his introductions to each part of *Tom Jones* illustrate; similarly, Robbe-Grillet is self-conscious of his *rejection* of the nineteenth-century realist tradition, and of his attempt to be scientifically objective in his distinction between the world of things, of objects, and the world of man. But neither writer can be so aware of the *social conditioning* process which affects all cultural creation: Robbe-Grillet, in seeking a new form, actually creates an alienated and reified structure in which man is merely a passive object living outside human relations. This is not Robbe-Grillet's intention, and a critical distinction must always be kept in mind between intention and achievement. Imaginative literature is a reconstruction of the world seen from a particular point of view, and while the writer may be aware of literary tradition, it is the non-conscious reworking of experience, fused with his values, which produces the fictional universe with which the sociology of literature is concerned. Goldmann emphasizes values, although not literary tradition, arguing that it is the writer's values which in the end yield an aesthetic structure. Structuralism in literary analysis departs radically from this formulation; it agrees with Goldmann's precept that literature can only be approached as literature, but argues that it must be wholly internal. 'The object of structural analysis of literature,' writes one structuralist critic, 'is literature, its literariness,' not its relation with other things.* The importance of Goldmann's approach, as we have seen, lies in his stress on the internal unity of a literary text as

* T. Todorov, 'Structural Analysis of Narrative', *Novel*, Fall, 1969.

the result of an external world vision held by a certain social group and class; the values which hold a particular work of literature together aesthetically are the direct expression of this world vision, and a coherent text is possible only in this way. It is important to stress this, since Goldmann's perspective on the sociology of literature is not a sociology of an occupational group – writers, their life styles, norms, social background, career patterns – but an attempt to link the text of particular authors in a meaningful way with particular historical conditions. The overall meaning of the text is its aim, and not the positivistic delineation of an occupational category.

We have seen that Goldmann's argument employs the functional necessity of a world vision for the existence of 'a unified and rigorous genre'. But can there be world visions today? At one point Goldmann remarks that great literature is created at moments of exceptional crisis in man's relation with others and the world:

> ... all forms of consciousness express a provisional and mobile balance between the individual and his social environment; when this balance can be fairly easily established and is relatively stable, or when it can pass fairly easily from one form to another, men tend not to think about the problems raised by their relationship to the external world. On the social as well as on an individual plane, it is the sick organ which creates awareness, and it is in periods of social and political crisis that men are most aware of the enigma of their presence in the world.*

Obvious examples suggest themselves: the relation between the development of the picaresque novel – *Don Quixote* for example – and the decline of the feudal world; the political and social upheavals engendered by the French Revolution which inform the work of Goethe, Beethoven, Hegel; and in this century, the protracted crisis of central Europe played against the background of the Russian Revolution and the rise of fascism, producing the *angst*-ridden writers, Musil, Kafka, Hesse, Céline.

But what of the great English realistic tradition? Was there a protracted crisis in nineteenth-century England spanning the years of Thackeray's novels to those of Gissing at the close of the century? There was certainly a social and economic crisis

* Goldmann, *The Hidden God*, p. 49.

during the 1930s, but it would be the most naïve of critics who would argue that in this period English literature was especially 'great'. The concept of crisis is a tenuous one and unlikely to help in the sociological analysis of literature: capitalism, as Marx remarked, is in a perpetual state of crisis in any case. But Goldmann links his notion of a world vision directly with crisis: in seventeenth-century France in a situation involving an historically impotent middle class, and a resultant tragic vision; and the modern crisis of collective versus individualistic values, communism and its antagonist, capitalism, in the work of Malraux. The significant element in both of Goldmann's analyses lies in his discussion of values. Thus for him, Pascal, Racine, and Kant, for example, developed a tragic view of life because social conditions obstructed the empirical working out of their fundamentally optimistic and progressive values. Kant emphasized reason in a world which seemed dominated by unreason, superstition, and custom; Pascal noted the dialectical character of the world, that everything tends towards flux and thus to change, but he could not extend this to the social sphere and thus go beyond his tragic vision of man as essentially inactive, as fundamentally passive. Malraux's *Man's Estate* expresses the progressive values of non-dogmatic, non-bureaucratized communism, while *Days of Hope* is built around the theme of party discipline, Stalinist policies and a war which is depicted almost entirely from a military angle: Malraux's vision was now a rigid orthodox ideology incapable of generating progressive values.* Goldmann seems to be suggesting here that a world vision is not merely a totality of social relations conceived at any one moment but also an awareness of the future; great writers are related to the present through their group and class affiliations, and to the future through the world vision. He is close to Engels's formulation on Balzac, who, although a Catholic and political legitimist, grasped the 'necessity' for the down-

* Progressive values are not necessarily those of the Communist Party, but are meant to imply a *human* as opposed to a market content. For example, it would be impossible to write a novel embodying the medieval values of blind obedience to State, religion, and family except as a work of pure propaganda. It is no accident that fascism has produced no writers of great creative ability, while Russian communism has produced as great literature only strong anti-communist and highly critical novels, such as *Doctor Zhivago* and Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle* and *Cancer Ward*.

fall of his favourite nobles and success for the bourgeoisie. The distinction between ideology and world vision is important: ideology is a false consciousness of the world, a partial, one-sided distortion of the real relations between men and their society, a perspective rather than totality. It would seem impossible, given this definition, for world visions to exist today unless they are Marxist, and since the vision creates the values which determine the aesthetic unity of the literary text, it would follow that modern literature is wholly ideological and partial. The unity of the text, after all, does not depend on its literary qualities but purely on *social* values; and without these values, there cannot be a unified genre, a genuine novel, an aesthetic totality.

Is it possible, for example, that a novelist who holds non-progressive values, a conservative reactionary or even neo-Fascist, could create a genuine literature? D. H. Lawrence, for example, is usually regarded as a major novelist, yet he was strongly anti-democratic,* while his conception of some kind of mystical blood bond existing between men and women and men and men is the antithesis of reason and might conceivably suggest a fascist mentality.† Lawrence wrote frankly on sexual and emotional relationships; his novels are rarely political or even social in the sense that milieu is concretely realized, and in his important works, *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love*, he writes almost to the exclusion of extrapersonalized themes. The theme of woman asserting her independence from man is a subject which many novelists had explored before Lawrence: Clarissa Harlowe refusing to marry for the sake of family property; George Eliot's Gwendolen Harleth (*Daniel Deronda*), Henry James's Isabel Archer (*The Portrait of a Lady*), and the heroines of the novels of Doris Lessing, are portraits of

* Writing on relations between men and women, Lawrence observed that the next relation 'has got to be a relationship of men towards men in a spirit of unfathomable trust and responsibility, service and leadership, obedience and pure authority. Men have got to choose their leaders, and obey them to the death. And it must be a system of culminating aristocracy, society tapering like a pyramid to the supreme leader' (D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, New York, Viking Press, 1960).

† Raymond Williams, in his chapter on Lawrence in *Culture and Society*, dismisses the claim that Lawrence was in any sense fascist but he cannot explain why undoubted fascist sentiments continually recur in Lawrence's philosophical and fictional writings.

women who endure unhappiness precisely because they refuse to compromise with the role which bourgeois society has allocated them. The sociological studies of widely different cultures have demonstrated that the differential treatment of men and women is more the result of cultural conditioning than of inherent abilities. Women are socialized to accept the feminine role, while men are defined through a tough masculine role, and society supports these definitions through institutionalized inequality of work and pay.* Conformity to prescribed roles constitutes at once a key component in bourgeois ideology.

Lawrence's treatment of the male/female, and male/male relations flows from his acceptance of the prescribed definitions accorded to men and women by his society. Women are by nature instinctive, they are not reasonable in the same sense as a man; intellectual women are frequently unhappy in their relations with men and it is better for the relation to be one of dominance by the man and passivity in the woman. Men and women *are* different inherently; the differences in socialization between the sexes is clearly an irrelevant detail for Lawrence, with the result that this *value*, this perspective on human relations, determines the asocial treatment of sexual relationships within his novels. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover* the relationship between the sexually frustrated Constance Chatterley and the gamekeeper, Mellors, is depicted as essentially a physical attraction mellowing into a deeper range of feelings in which the intellectual Constance submits to the 'pure' fire of the man. During their first sexual experience she fails to achieve orgasm but it lifts a 'great cloud' from her mind although 'her tormented modern woman's brain still had no rest'. Complete contentment is possible only in virtual submission to her purely feminine role: Lawrence indeed has a simple message, for as women are by nature different from men they will strive towards intellectual equality at the risk of losing their essential being,

* For useful discussion and references, see J. Mitchell, 'Women, The Longest Revolution', *New Left Review*, 40. This conservative ideology is nowhere better expressed than in television commercials, especially those concerned with wholly domestic products: the wife cleans the shirts of her two men and, waving goodbye to both in the mornings, one to school, the other to work, the commercial suggests she goes with the whiteness too, is part of it – the wife and the soap powder are one.

their femininity.* Thus in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* the real point is not Lawrence's apparent sexual iconoclasm, his attack on bourgeois hypocrisy and the deadening effects which industrial civilization has on human relationships, but the development of the Constance/Mellors relation from one of pure physical passion towards a social and human connection. But Lawrence succeeds only in isolating the erotic element in love and rarely grasps the social determinations of human emotions; he does not structure relationships *socially*, for he sees the basic relation, men and women, as asocial, as belonging to the realms of 'pure' blood and longing. Numerous passages could be cited showing this asocial approach: in *Women in Love*, Birkin, who is in love with Ursula, lies sick in bed and muses on sex and love:

> In the old age, before sex was, we were mixed, each one a mixture. The process of singling into individuality resulted into the great polarization of sex. The womanly drew to one side, the manly to the other. But the separation was imperfection even then. And so our world cycle passes . . . The man is pure man, the woman pure woman, they are perfectly polarized. But there is no longer any of the horrible merging, mingling self-abnegation of love. There is only the pure duality of polarization, each one free from any contamination of the other. In each, the individual is primal, sex is subordinate, but perfectly polarized. Each has a single, separate being, with its own laws. The man has his pure freedom, the woman hers. Each acknowledges the perfection of the polarized sex-circuit. Each admits the different nature in the other.†

What Birkin is pondering is roles, and roles are social and not inherent; each of us performs certain roles every day, we follow rules, custom, and habit. As individuals we have been defined by *others*, by the roles others expect us to perform. What Lawrence is saying is perfectly clear: it is that human relationships, that is social relationships, are pre-eminently the result of non-social factors, especially, one might almost say, solely, the 'dark brooding of the blood'. Thus between Gudrun and Gerald, two other lovers in this novel, 'a diabolical freemasonry subsisted between them',* a relationship which ends despairingly in the Alps and in death.

* The sexes must be kept pure, 'pure maleness in a man, pure femaleness in a woman. Woman is really polarized downwards, towards the centre of the earth. Her deep positivity is in the downward flow, the moon-pull. And man is polarized upwards, towards the sun and the day's activity. Women and men are dynamically different, in everything. Even in the mind, where we seem to meet, we are really utter strangers . . . The apparent mutual understanding, in companionship between a man and a woman is always an illusion, and always breaks down in the end' (Lawrence, op. cit., p. 215).
† D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, London, Penguin Books, 1960, p. 225.

Lawrence is a reactionary thinker; he has a distinct ideology which results in depicting love relations, that is, social relationships in non-social terms. There is no totality within his novels: the foreground is wholly taken up with the basic problem of the blood and sexual polarity; human relationships develop within this field – thus in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the conversations between Constance and Mellors are exclusively discussions of sex, of man and woman, and the self in love: 'But I tell you, the old rampers have beaks between their legs and they tear at you with it till you're quite sick. Self, self, self.'† Human relations are defined in terms of sexuality; and a sexuality which is sociologically absurd, for men and women live within a society which defines their range of interests as well as their sexuality; a genuine human relation is one of equals, and this Lawrence never depicts.

Lawrence's values, therefore, can be seen as the structuring principle behind his novels. Perhaps this is an obvious point, the fact that he could hold non-progressive values on an area which is crucial for any proper grasp of man in society, human sex relations, and that his attitude here defined his *overall novelistic universe*. But this could be seen as one approach to analysing his fiction sociologically, as well as fruitfully suggesting his limitations as a great novelist.

But all this is tentative, and is merely introduced to illustrate the problem of a unified text written from a non-progressive value position. The same points would apply to the contemporary French novelist Henri de Montherlant in his tetralogy of novels which depict the love life of a writer, Costals.‡ Everything is seen from his position: women are scheming for a marriage. He prefers simple, physical types, not the intellectual, and the

* ibid., p. 137.
† D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, London, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 210.
‡ H. de Montherlant, *Les Jeunes Filles, Pitie pour les Femmes, Le Demon du Bien, Les Lepreuses*, Paris, 1936–9.

descriptions of his relations are couched in the language of conflict and opposition:

> He thought she might be armed, and was going to kill him, or at least slap his face, and in order to be able to ward off the blow, he moved still closer to her, as modern bullfighters stick close to the bull's flank in order to be 'inside' a blow from its horns.*

Montherlant, like Lawrence, isolates the erotic component in love, defines women's proper position as different from men in that the intellect obstructs femininity and emotional satisfaction.† Montherlant is a conservative ideologist, his values are non-progressive, and like Lawrence, his definitions flow from an acceptance of the definitions which society has accorded its members. His novels are never totalities; they depict men and women in isolation from society in that their relation has no organic connection with it – they develop from mere passion, continue from habit, and are characterized by conflict because of the basic differences in temperament, intellect, etc., which Montherlant clearly believes differentiate the sexes.

These, then, are some of the problems in the methodology of the sociology of literature. The values which a writer holds may be on the decisive clue to his status as a great writer – but this would imply that a writer does not go against his values through his art, as does Balzac for example. But Balzac's realistic method corrected his reactionary values; it may be more difficult for contemporary authors to transcend conservative theory, given the novel's development from realism to its subjectivist state today. This is, however, a problem and we have merely hinted at it.

In conclusion we may say that the sociology of literature can develop only through its grip on texts, not in reducing literature to the status of a reflection of society. Not only do writers articulate social values within their work, and these will surely have certain ramifications for the work's unity and possible

* *Les Jeunes Filles*, trans. T. Kilmartin, as *The Girls*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969.

† Thus in conversation with his mistress, Costals remarks, 'Everyone knows that a woman's body, when it's no longer young, tends to become a ridiculous and often repulsive object, a joy for cartoonists, whereas a man's body as old age draws near, keeps in much better shape' (ibid., p. 221). Such is the curious language of love, if indeed Montherlant depicts this.

literary qualities, but writers are part of the world they describe, frequently struggling with the question of values, and this *potential* activism must not be discounted in the analysis of their work.

Part Two:
The Writer and Society
by Diana Laurenson

Introduction

As has been outlined in Part One of this book, there is a growing body of theory in the study of literary works which suggests that works of literature do not arise autonomously. While not causally determined by the extraneous situation, they are connected with a number of social factors which help us to understand their genesis, form, and content. The type and economic level of society in which the writer is working; the social classes and groups to which he belongs or with which he relates directly or indirectly; the character of his audience, sponsorship, and patronage; the literary tradition in which he works; his own psychology – these are some of the variables which must be considered in any comprehensive sociology of literature. The strength of any of these, the total equation, will vary according to the period in which the author is writing, and according to the pulls and pressures, sanctions and opportunities, which are operating, moulding the way in which he structures his world, affecting the presentation of his material. Goldmann and others have suggested that in the present century there has been a twofold process of fragmentation of coherent world views in Western society, a questioning of values and norms of behaviour, together with pecuniary pressures which drive many writers to find second jobs within a formalized social pattern, such as the mass media, the universities, and other professional occupations. The equation varies according to subject matter and readership: whether the author is writing works of information, entertainment, or aiming at creating serious literature in the form of novels, plays, short stories, essays, criticism, or poetry. With the enormous increase of published works, with the growth of distinct reading publics and specialized authorship, the sociological study of literature in the modern age becomes a formidable undertaking; although

first-hand information can be obtained as to biographical data, we lack advantages resulting from temporal distance. We do not know for certain which works will be accepted as 'great art' (if any – and why); our own closeness and predilections distort and confuse. None the less much work can be done, if only to provide material for a future theory of twentieth-century literature to be formulated in a meaningful way. In the first two of the following three chapters, the changing market situation of the author in England is examined in relation to growing professionalization in the nineteenth century. In the third, a look is taken at the situation of the modern writer. A connection is evident between economic and social structure, the author's perspective, his self-image, and the character of his work.

5 Origins of Authorship and Patronage

It is generally assumed that the oral and written arts arose out of the magical formulae and rituals of paleolithic times, closely associated with the visual and plastic arts.* This must have been preceded by a period of linguistic experimentation, of 'sensory grasping', as language itself developed.† As structured and communicating groups became established, the use of signs, whether written, oral, or of gesture, developed into stylistic techniques. These techniques of communication had various functions for the community.

Besides the obvious function of imparting information, records could be kept and transmitted, thus providing the group with a history. Meaning was bestowed to remembered experiences and exploits, rendering them more or less permanent. The group was provided with a historical dimension denied to structured groups of animals. The elements of case law and a reference for comparison now existed. This reservoir of history enhanced the sense of conscious identity of the group and its reduplication acted as a medium for memories, fantasies, hopes, and fears. The ceremonial presentation of these records gave scope for elaboration and decoration, for differential styles of display according to the situation and the talents of the communicator.

Another important function was manipulation of the unknown. Oral and written techniques provided a medium for incantation, ritual and ceremonial, together with pictorial representation, dancing and mime. The arts became a type of property which could be commanded and used as status symbols by tribal kings and power groups. A class of people emerged whose role was the

* Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962, vol. 1, ch. 1.
† Ernst Fischer, *The Necessity of Art*, London, Penguin Books, 1963, ch. 2.

specialized provision of this commodity, at first closely associated with magic and the priesthood,* and related to some rewarding and protective figure, to a 'patron'. The early bards reproduced and composed songs and sagas and as such were the first authors. Early literary productions manifested the principles of imitating or mirroring reality, information, and decoration, their function being largely one of providing emotional release and a transcending of individuality. Myths developed, embodying human needs and goals, becoming vehicles for symbolic figures and common predicaments, handed on from generation to generation.

The talents and training of the earliest literary craftsmen and artists, together with their priestly associations, contributed to the image of the writer as a blind seer, filled with 'inner light', able to foretell the future yet unfit for the noble occupation of war. From early times, we find awe and respect mingled with a certain contempt and an awareness of 'difference' towards the artist; these attitudes are still evident today. But the early writers were much more integrated into the social group than the estranged, free-floating writers of this century, whose work is frequently characterized by subjectivity and withdrawal. In Greece the epic writer Homer was closely involved with the values, fears, aims, and goals of his people, expressing their world view. With the breakdown of such organic social solidarity we find writers moving away from their integrated position and new genres and specialisms developing.

This process is accelerated by the development of division of labour and capitalist modes of production, which provide a perspective in which the artist is no longer a key and central figure in the social group. Capitalism evolves an ideology in which the artist does not have a vital and integral function to perform; he feels therefore edged to the periphery of society, encouraged to produce diversions for leisure hours, literature of entertainment, escape, or naturalistic social reporting that does not constitute a fundamental challenge. The developing class structure and inequalities in the provisions for education and leisure tend to restrict readership to the upper and middle classes, and to gear literary content to the views and tastes of these classes. Hence – with a few exceptions – the loss

* For an account of magical invective, see Mathew Hodgart, *Satire*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, World University Library, 1963, pp. 18–21.

of totality and universality in literary works. Contact between the social classes diminishes, and structural separatism is reflected in the literature of the day. Great writers alone can withstand these pressures. They have the talents and acumen necessary to express a wide experience of life on all social levels, and the integrity to offer a critique of bourgeois values and ideology. They can transcend their own position and resist pressures to conformity and restriction, being conscious of society as a structured social system with inherent contradictions and conflicts. Finally they develop insights into focal points of change. Shakespeare can foreshadow modern despair and nihilism while retaining a realistic and comprehensive awareness of the dynamics of his own world. Goethe and Tolstoy are other obvious examples. Totality of vision is more difficult to achieve as capitalism develops, although social criticism may be facilitated by the decline of personal patronage and of severe censorship penalties. The hegemony of bourgeois values itself breaks down in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the conflicting values which remain contribute to the fragmentation and obscurities of much of modern literature.* In England there were forces promoting relative integration of the writer until the 1880s, when his economic and social position deteriorated.

Throughout history, social factors affected the evolution of literary genres such as the ritualistic epic, lyric poetry, the essay, drama (comic and tragic), the mime, the courtly romance or picaresque tale, and finally the novel. While the development of systems of ancient feudalism was closely connected with institutions of fealty or loyalty of vassals to their protecting lords – these duties overriding personal loyalty – classical tragedy was often concerned with conflict between these loyalities: a conflict in which the author himself might be involved. Fresh genres evolved with changing economic and social conditions: as wars increased in scale, ritualistic forms of literature gave way to war sagas, becoming epic, fluctuating with or returning to lyric forms for the celebration of other community or personal experiences such as peace, birth, love, or joy in nature. The feudal hierarchy gave the bard or court poet a recognized and relatively stable position, enabling an institutionalized role and self-image to develop. At the same time wandering players

* See Ernst Fischer, op. cit., p. 52.

and singers were also welcome for their novelty in a world of severely circumscribed communications.

Aspects of authorship still evident today are therefore discernible from early times – in this case two types of author: the established, institutionalized, and the marginal, nomadic. In an organic society, however, this did not necessarily result in differential fragmentation in the works themselves. Within the community the transmuted saga in its epic form gave way finally to the tragedy of tension, authors gradually differentiating themselves from reciters or workshops of players. In some instances, however, works continued to be performed by their group authors: examples here are the mime and the morality play written, embellished, acted, and produced by church and guild members. There was a continuous development of both folk and professional literature in feudal society, the latter mainly connected with the Court. At times these merged: the Nibelung-lied, for instance, originated at Court, then was taken among the people by the wandering poets and minstrels, passing through a folk poetry stage, finally returning to courtly patronage and a courtly form again. The important thing to note from the point of view of the sociology of literature is that early authors were in close touch with their audience, whether Court or people. They shared their world view, and consequently achieved totality in their work, avoiding fragmentation.

As societies increased in complexity, as commerce and division of labour developed, and as capitalistic modes of production were adopted, totality was more and more difficult to achieve. Writers lost their social integration and their texts became more esoteric and partial.* They lost their position of centrality and were forced increasingly to rely on some powerful personal patron or sponsor. This relationship became common, and lasted until the widening market situation of the nineteenth century made a return to a different form of professionalism possible, bringing important changes in literary works.

*This was accentuated in the present century. In England the circulating libraries and middle-class magazine clientèle enabled novelists to remain in relatively close touch with their readers until the 1880s. But their works did not reach the bulk of society, the working classes being in the main excluded.

I

The central aspect of patronage relevant to the sociology of literature is that it constitutes an exchange relationship between a pair of persons of unequal status; one of these, the patron, giving the other, the author, certain material or protective benefits which enable the literary work to be produced and distributed in an uncertain or even hostile environment. One obvious benefit is the necessary leisure for the gestation and creation of books; there is also insulation from censorship or prosecution, and spokesmanship by the patron in return for a eulogistic dedication. The writer offers or pledges his patron various rewards such as loyalty or fame. There is a wide range of types of allegiance and protection, merging into coercion and servitude; patronage can be long or short term. There is also a range of techniques for avoiding the full impact of domination by a patron and of manipulation by the writer. Naturally, social conditions, institutions such as censorship, types of class and power structures, differential economic opportunity, and chances of regional and social mobility affect these techniques.

Since the artist, as a manipulator of visual or linguistic symbols, had a recognized role in the social group, he could fulfil a meaningful function. He offered a variety of services including entertainment and emotional catharsis, depending for his existence on the support of king or élite group power-structure. In a small cohesive society his relationship with both sponsors and audience was close and intimate. He knew the needs, fears, goals, and world views of his environment, and these he expressed in his work, which became a mode of group expression, whether or not it was written by one person. The poetic epics of Homer are obvious examples. But this happy situation could not last; societies grew and engulfed other groups, positions in the social hierarchy increased and became more sharply defined. This brought a gradual loosening of close social bonds between some layers of society and the artist. The artist's role itself became specialised as division of labour developed: poets, dramatists, singers, musicians, sculptors, painters, differentiated and aimed at perfecting a preferred mode of artistic expression.* A money

* This process was gradual. During the Renaissance it was still common for artists to be proficient in various branches of art.

economy with its accompanying commercial activity offered new prizes and goals; the position of the artist became hazardous and marginal. It became a major task for him to find and please a patron of means who would sustain, protect, and favour him rather than his rivals. These were increasing in number as society expanded, and were becoming both allies and threats; writers could band together in coteries but they competed for fame and recognition.

One feature of artistic creativity which marks it off from many other occupations is that a period of gestation, contemplation, and planning usually precedes the end product. A period of initiation or training may also be essential. The role of the patron before the days of the bureaucratization of the literary profession was complex: like the early capitalist he had to invest in a risk. Often he had to support his client for many years, help him in his training, protect him from rivals, always with the possibility that the results might not be to his tastes and predilections – although the artist obviously felt constraints to please his patron. This affected the character of the work; in an environment where alternative openings were few, the writer was particularly coerced.

In the cohesive group, ideology was shared and so the bargaining situation was relatively simple. For the graphic artist ideology might be irrelevant or unimportant. But the writer uses words upon which subtle constructions can be placed: his message may be ambiguous and contain threats to the social hierarchy at the apex of which his patron stands. When ideology was not shared, in a society where factions were becoming vocal and conflicting world views were developing, the writer might be dangerous and censorship was necessary. The Tsar of Russia's relationship with the poet Pushkin is informative on this type of patronage. The relationship of Chaucer with the English monarchy is an example of a smoother patronage, where ideology was shared, yet contact with total society was not yet lost.

An example of coercive patronage of an extreme nature can be examined if we look at the relationship between the Tsar Nicholas I and Pushkin. This association stands out as shaped to a great extent by forces outside the immediate control of both participants: on the one hand a tradition of rigid repression by a dynasty claiming magical sanctions for its autocracy, on the other hand a period of repressed unrest, of feudalism changing from

within. This state of affairs was reflected in a literature using symbolic cryptic literary messages – 'Aesopic language' – of a revolutionary nature, as well as by acts of violence committed directly or indirectly by members of the intellectual class. The role of the Russian Tsar was even more hazardous than that of the Russian writer: three of the last six Tsars met violent deaths, regicide plots were numerous and suffered barbarous retaliation. Censorship control was highly centralized and terroristic; it was mainly negative since it was concerned to obliterate all ideas which appeared iconoclastic or advocating change; this attitude produced suspicion of works of popular education and information for wider audiences. During the mid nineteenth century there seemed to be a culmination of censorial absurdity. Phrases such as 'forces of nature' and 'free currents of air' were banned, Roman emperors could not be 'killed' but must 'perish', and penalties included suppression or mutilation of works, and the exile of authors and publishers.*

Yet over these years a flourishing literary realist movement developed, and the nineteenth century produced a display of Russian writers of genius: Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Turgenev, Gogol, Gorki, Pushkin, and many others. This was during a time when the number of officials engaged in censorship exceeded the number of books published in a year; a committee to censor the censors was set up; while the number of bodies concerned with scrutinizing the written word included the Church, the military, the universities, the ministries of education and transport, the police, and even the administration of state horse-breeding. Censors were so anxious not to be penalized for inactivity that they would object to innocuous material: on one occasion, calling a woman's smile 'heavenly' was deemed blasphemous or immoral. Some conservative writers such as Goncharov actually became censors themselves. Periodicals were often suppressed. To give but two examples of literary mutilation: Tolstoy's *Resurrection* received five hundred alterations, and Dostoevsky's *Notes From The Underground* (1864) was 'ruined by those swine of censors' who 'banned the section where I deduced the need for a belief in Christ'.† The

* Ronald Hingley, *Russian Writers and Society*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967.
† Quoted by Ronald Hingley, op. cit., p. 230.

unpredictability of the process (or the stupidity of the censors) is manifested by the appearance of *Capital*, uncensored, in 1872, Russia being the first country to publish a translation. Writers responded by evolving secret codes, privately circulating manuscripts and publishing abroad. Clearly the social conditions propitious for the generation of literary genius are complex.

As a young man, Pushkin was involved in the 1825 Decembrist Revolt, the five leaders of which, including a poet, were hung; Pushkin himself, whose secretly circulated *Ode to Liberty* had fallen into the hands of the police, was lucky only to receive banishment to a minor clerkship in the south of Russia. Later, Nicholas I summoned him and announced 'Send me your writings: from now on, it is I who shall be your censor.' It is alleged that he added, pointing at the leaving poet 'From now on he is mine.' In exchange for a humiliating position at Court and some security for his wife and children, Pushkin found that he was closely watched by the notorious Count Benckendorf, Chief of Police. He was sent criticism and advice, asked to change the content of his work by the Tsar, and also subjected to the official censorship. The publication of *Boris Godunov*, for example, was delayed for five years because the author read it privately to a literary circle without first submitting it to the Tsar, who later sent advice through Benckendorf that it should be changed from a dramatic poem to a 'historical tale or novel similar to Scott's' (1826). To this Pushkin replied, 'I am sorry that it is beyond my power to recast what I have written'; the eventual publication was only allowed as a special favour to help with the expenses of his marriage. The Tsar took a social interest in the poet's wife, refusing him leave to travel or to retire to the country to work, subjecting him to intolerable supervision, and forcing him to attend Court functions. Pushkin died, aged thirty-eight, as the result of a duel with his wife's suspected lover; as he was dying, word was sent that the Tsar would settle his debts and look after his wife and children, thus concluding the questionable benefits of a patronage that was enforced as an Imperial favour, but which was motivated mainly by political fear, resulting in stultifying and even fatal effects on its recipient.

This is an extreme example of one pole of the patronage

continuum: not all Court patronage, of course, was of this bizarre and possessive nature. What did the patron gain from the relationship? Clearly from the crudest point of view both works of art of all kinds and their creators could be regarded as status symbols to impress other élite figures. In a cohesive society, as we have seen, rulers needed not only the information, historical records, and adjuncts to magic and ceremonial provided by literature but also a medium for entertaining and distracting the people, which provided a rationale of events and policies, offering emotional release. From early on, the political value – and dangers – of authors were obvious; pressure on them to provide propaganda overtly or obliquely in return for protection was recurrent. Patrons themselves had the wealth and leisure for taste and discrimination. Many became connoisseurs of a high level, although others were notoriously insensitive and greedy. In a mainly illiterate world, a writer at Court possessed useful expertise: some patrons formed circles of scholars and artists whose fame and impact was widespread.

In ancient Rome a situation developed which was particularly conducive to dyadic patronage. Before the rise of capitalism the artist performed a twofold task: the expression of the needs of his social group, and the ordering and structuring of his own experience of social reality. In the ancient world these aims could be harmoniously intertwined. In Rome, however, the severe factional conflict which culminated in the murder of Caesar was followed by the reign of Augustus, who was anxious to reconcile the factions and to promote peace and consolidation at home and in the Empire. With the aid of Maecenas he deliberately cultivated and used writers such as Virgil, Horace, and Livy to present a favourable image of his person and to promote a return to the harmony of the old Republic. Naturally he feared the fate of his predecessors; a general policy of encouragement of the arts was accompanied by patronage of specific writers to promote his goals and safeguard his person. Maecenas became an archetypal and legendary figure; his name was a synonym for the literary patron. A similar deliberate cultivation of writers by patrons for their own ends occurred during the eighteenth century in England, in a different sociological setting. This is one reason why the literary world of the time was called the Augustan age; another reason is the similarity between the two

compact, intimate, and flourishing cities, Rome and London. The writers of the second upheld the values promoted by Augustus in the first: order, balance, elegance, and retrenchment, the values of the so-called 'classical temper'.

The break up of the Roman Empire, with the ensuing barbaric invasions, disrupted these values. Cultural activity withdrew into the Christian monasteries: writers and scholars could here find a haven and patronage so long as they did not infringe Catholic susceptibilities. The west coast of Ireland was one such retreat. Ecclesiastical patronage of writers continued into the feudal age and beyond; it occurred when affluent ecclesiastical figures or groups valued the arts and scholarship for their own sake, when records needed to be produced and preserved, and when policies or doctrines had to be promoted. Latin was a language which superseded national boundaries and facilitated communication and unity in the Catholic world: it was the language which articulated the Catholic world view. Before the age of printing, ecclesiastical manuscripts in Latin were valued for their visual as well as their literary merit – they were embellished by illuminators and craftsmen. Their scarcity value and intrinsic aesthetic appeal meant that even after the invention of printing much literature continued to appear in manuscript form. This was limited in quantity and circulated only within Court and ecclesiastical élite groups. Vernacular literature was mostly oral folk poetry and tales for an illiterate audience. Much has been lost, although some has been retrieved by scholars.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a movement of secular vernacular poets and writers developed, bridging the gap between Court and folk literature, combining the advantages of feudal literary patronage and contact with popular literary audiences. The troubadours and trouvères in France and Spain, and the Minnesingers in Germany wrote love lyrics conforming to the feudal tradition of courtly love and romances for a wider audience. The work of Chrêtien de Troyes was a starting point for the Grail romances: he developed many of the Arthurian legends which appear to have originated in old Welsh bardic sources. Secular literature in praise of nature, drinking, lovemaking, and other 'natural' phenomena appeared, was transcribed, and was circulated alongside sacred works, old legends, and tales of heroic deeds. Some of these illustrate

interesting changes in values. The *Roman de la Rose* (1240), for example, by Guillaume de Lorris, started as an allegorical romance on the art of love, and was finished forty years later by Jean de Meung with a refutation, in the rationalist vein of the thirteenth century, of the doctrine of courtly love. This stressed naturalism and a cynical view of the relations between the sexes; fragments exist of a translation by Chaucer. The famous vernacular *Chanson de Roland* of the twelfth century is a version of an earlier work written in Latin. Writers would often record and embellish existing myths and legends.

The spread of literature in vernacular English, French and German promoted specific national literature written for a popular audience. Some of this was by itinerant scholars, who wandered from one medieval university to another, but much was by Court or church writers sustained by affluent ecclesiastical or aristocratic patrons, or by the monarchy itself. In England, Chaucer and Gower are always cited as writers who benefited from a cross-fertilization between Court and people. Chaucer was the son of a vintner; he became a Court page and married a lady-in-waiting. After being captured as a member of Edward III's army in France he was ransomed, and thereafter had a regular Court position, his duties ranging from making the King's bed to entertaining the court with songs, poems, and romances. He came into contact with the works of Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch while on diplomatic missions to Italy; later he held Court positions of some responsibility, such as Controller of Customs in London and Clerk of the King's Works. Royal patronage brought him a life pension relatively early, together with various marks of the king's favour such as a daily pitcher of wine, enabling him to satisfy his 'wit to make books, songs, and ditties in rime', to give time to 'sitting at a book as dumb as a stone', living when he wished 'as a hermit, though unlike a hermit his abstinence was little'. Chaucer, then, is an example of one who benefited from regal patronage without losing contact with the social realities of his society or the freedom to portray them, warts and all.

It is impossible to assess the losses to literature which must have resulted from hazards blocking potential writers. Some could not obtain even a rudimentary education from monastery, grammar school, or private sources. Others were locked by

feudal custom into arduous occupations, or conscripted into armies. Some died at an early age from diseases which are curable today. Others were imprisoned for sedition and prevented from writing, or merely failed to find patronage. As towns developed, and with them commerce and the guild system, writing skills became more generally in demand and a more varied patronage structure developed. The encouraging and constrictive factors affecting literary creativity are thus intimately associated with the growth and development of social institutions.

The princedoms and city-states of Renaissance Italy occupied a peculiar position in the development of patronage. Although factional rivalries, despotism, and inter-city conflict were common, a tradition of benevolent patronage emerged, which was emulated by European aristocracies and men of means. The early development in northern Italy of banking and commerce, under the Medici family and others, brought affluence which enabled the finest artists to be employed and protected by the ruling bourgeoisie. An outstanding example is Lorenzo the Magnificent, who was invited by the citizens of Florence to rule the city in 1469. He was himself deeply interested in the arts; he invited artists, musicians, scholars, and writers, who made Florence the cultural capital of Europe – at a time when England was embroiled in the Wars of the Roses, when France and Spain had hardly emerged as national states, and when Germany was split into three hundred principalities, some of them run by robber barons. The example of Florence became a legend that encouraged European rulers, and later the wealthy bourgeoisie, to become literate and to patronize the arts. Travellers and diplomats brought home news of Italian patronage; men of taste and letters were protected not merely as court or family entertainers; patrons themselves learned from them and fostered scholarship and taste. This encouraged widespread familiarity with the culture of ancient Greece and Rome, which in turn influenced the emerging humanism which challenged the dogmatism of the Roman Church. On the economic level, Italian institutions of banking and commerce facilitated the breakdown of feudalism and the rise of capitalism in countries ready to profit from interaction with them.*

In England, then, interaction with Renaissance Italy had

* The Name of Lombard Street in London is a reminder of this interaction.

many repercussions. In the field of literary patronage it reinforced the tradition of honouring scholars and men of genius which had been handed down from the days of Alfred, but which had lapsed during times of strife and foreign wars. The self-cultivation of the Tudor monarchs owes much to Italian example. Like Lorenzo the Magnificent, Henry VIII and Elizabeth wrote poetry and studied the arts; an additional role for the writer and musician – that of court mentor – was renewed. This was particularly important in England, where cultural sophistication lagged behind that of many parts of Europe. Special economic conditions obtained here which were conducive to the early development of capitalism; commercial activity hastened the transition to so-called bourgeois art, with 'expression taking the place of decoration as a prominent stylistic device*.' This promoted the extension of a patronage which was not circumscribed to a few potentates within the city-state boundary, as it was in Italy. Sustained, nurturing patronage, like the feudal concept of order and the Catholic hostility towards usury, was in conflict with a large-scale society moving from an agricultural economy with a rigidly closed social structure.† During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries English patronage was confined mainly to the centralized monarch and his family, and to the greater ecclesiastical dignitaries: during the sixteenth century it spread to a circle of cultivated aristocrats and became less permanent, more commercialized.

By 1600 the clarity of what has been called the 'old patronage system', where protection and fealty were dominant in most areas, where most writers sought court appointments or lived permanently in an aristocratic home, was breaking down in England. Writers were looking to wider audiences than simply to the select aristocratic clique, with its private jokes and favoured stylistic devices. Some of the ramifications of the rigid class system were becoming fluid and unpredictable. This change affected the classes and groups from which writers themselves

* Phoebe Sheavyn, *The Literary Profession in the Elizabethan Age*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1967.
† E. H. Miller, *The Professional Writers in Elizabethan England. A Study of Nondramatic Literature*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1959, p. 94.

were drawn, and was reflected in the work of major writers who were sensitive to social change. We have a foretaste of fragmented perspectives and individualism in the work of Shakespeare and John Donne. Anxiety connected with discontinuities and insecurity are expressed, together with a fear that the crumbling of the Catholic world view and the medieval belief in an ordered social hierarchy (corresponding to the angelic ranks about the deity) might 'cause the heavenly bodies to start madly from their spheres', with a final reversal to primeval chaos. Shakespeare expresses this fear:

> Take but degree away, untune that string
> And hark what discord follows. Each thing meets
> In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters
> Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores
> And make a sop of all this solid globe:
> Strength should be lord of imbecility
> And the rude son should strike the father dead.*

The themes of madness and chaos are constantly present in the texts of Shakespeare: 'But I do love thee – and when I love thee not, Chaos is come again,' cries Othello. Timon of Athens, the deranged Lear, and Feste, the fool mock the 'corruption' of the age; Timon especially attacks its commercial prop, gold.

Likewise Donne:

> The sun is lost, and th'earth, and no man's wit
> Can well direct him where to look for it:
> And freely men confess that this world's spent,
> When in the planets and the firmament
> They seek so many new; they see that this
> Is crumbled out against his anatomies:
> T'is all in pieces, all coherence gone,
> All just supply and all relation . . .†

The style of life of an Elizabethan actor and dramatist and the fact that his audiences were more representative of total society – unlike those of the later Restoration drama – facilitated a comprehensive grasp of social pressures. Shakespeare remained in

* William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*. These themes intertwine, of course, with others. Shakespeare also presents heroes who epitomize optimism, vitality, and humour: Harry Hotspur, Falstaff, Trinculo, the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*.
† John Donne, *An Anatomy of the World*.

contact with all social levels, with both town and rural society.* While the patronage situation of the writer had become insecure by this time, certain advantages were available, especially to the dramatists who were not confined to the artificialities of the court.

By the time of Elizabeth, poets were demanding dedication fees: the usual price for the dedication of a drama was forty shillings, although at times the sums exchanged were as low as two shillings and sixpence. The cash nexus had entered the patronage situation, and literary works were assuming the aspect of commodities to be offered to the highest bidder. In this era of 'late patronage', continuous personal bonds had become loosened and barriers increased between writer and patron, the latter being offered extravagant eulogies as baits for sponsorship. This accelerated the turnover of patrons: Robert Green had sixteen patrons for seventeen books. Political insecurity, censorship, and the often unpredictable whims of the monarch increased the caution and uneasiness felt by patrons: a pool of unsponsored authors took refuge in the Elizabethan Grub Street.† Here fawning, starving, and feckless hacks were said to drink away their gains in the ale-house, a prey to political schemers.

Some notable patrons, of course, were evident: Philip Sidney, himself a poet, sponsored Spenser and many others. Together with his sister, Mary Herbert, he was renowned for discrimination and generosity. Others employed writers as tutors, secretaries, and private diplomats. Most of the non-amateur writers between 1520 and 1650 came from 'humble origins' and by the time of their death many had become courtiers and members of the top fifth of the social hierarchy.‡ Literature became a means of social mobility when aligned to favourable sponsorship; a deep gulf emerged – and has remained – between the successful and the unrecognized.

This close identification of the writer with his patron, which

* A further point here is that no barrier of language separated the social classes; popular idiom mingled with the language of the court. (See L. C. Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*, London, Peregrine Books, 1962, pp. 20–21.)

† An actual street in Shoreditch, later renamed Milton Street.

‡ J. W. Saunders, *The Profession of English Letters*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964, p. 35.

was characteristic of 'old patronage', was becoming dislocated by 1600 and had deteriorated long before the eighteenth century, which is generally assumed to be the age of the decay of patronage.* As we have seen, this affected the social perspectives of writers, and the character of their texts. While the feudal poet had an established position in the great household, sharing the basic assumptions of his benefactors and often considering his vocation as writer secondary to fealty to his lord in peace and war, few Elizabethan writers remained in close association under the roof of their protectors. One cannot even trust dedications as evidence of patronage. Some were attached to works without the knowledge of the hoped-for benefactors; many euphemisms are ridiculous. An increasing number turned on the system with disgust, Spenser in *The Shepherd's Calendar* citing Maecenas as 'yclad in claye', and Nashe punning 'Maecenasses'.

Fragmentation of patronage in England was accelerated by the early development of the mercantile temper. This encouraged a demand for publications of 'utility' such as trade manuals; literary figures and their works were considered 'foppish' or 'fantastic' by many practical men. The character of the English class structure is another important factor. The fortunes of the English nobility fluctuated in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; new aristocratic power figures were continually being created: this created a climate of favour-seeking, and dislocated the continuity of affluent noblemen, destroying the contemplative leisure necessary for a discriminating patronage of the arts. Until the end of Elizabeth's reign the nobility sought preferment by concentration on official policies of political consolidation and peace; government pamphleteers were protected and sponsored rather than literary writers. Translators and producers of utilitarian booklets supporting the government's policies were particularly encouraged: in the 1560s a group of translators was given continuous patronage by the Privy Council; their obvious usefulness was enhanced by the unity of their social background.† Patrons and translators alike came from the 'gentry' class, sharing education at university and Inns of Court; many were linked by family ties and held similar humanistic beliefs and opinions. They were clearly considered 'safer' than

* E. H. Miller, op. cit., ch. 4.

† Such as Golding and Turberville (see E. H. Miller, op. cit., p. 103).

authors from a different social class – Spenser, for example, was the son of a journeyman clothmaker, Drayton of a tanner or butcher, Marlowe of a cobbler, Kyd of a scrivener, Webster of a merchant taylor, Green of a saddler, and Herrick of a goldsmith. Unlike these figures, the gentlemen translators mostly possessed a private income and did not need continuous pecuniary support; this was useful when their patrons were themselves suffering from the growing aggrandizement of the merchant class. Hence they were chosen in preference to the self-made intellectuals of greater creative ability; the latter usually reached the university (with the exception of Shakespeare, Jonson, and Drayton), but not the security of sustained patronage.

The situation of the Elizabethan writer was therefore complex. One myth to be dispelled has been called the 'Gloriana fallacy'. 'The reputation of Elizabeth as a patron of letters and learning has been derived, not from her deeds, but largely from legends based on the many adulatory dedications to her. No such reputation was probably more cheaply bought.'* A survey of English poetry in 1589 cites the 'scorn and ordinarie disgrace offered unto poets in these days'† and the neglect of literature by the Court. Other writers bear witness to the Queen's manipulating and dallying habits resulting from her own personal and monetary insecurity. Neale called her court and the nobility 'the illustrious order of Mendicants'.‡ But there was one area where she did perform a service to literature. She encouraged the drama, effectively thwarting magistrates who sought to close the theatres. This action safeguarded the position of the actor-author Shakespeare: 'if this central sun had been extinguished the whole galaxy (the minor lights of the Elizabethan drama) would have remained in comparative obscurity'.§ The Court's interest in the theatre, which permitted performances before varied audiences, was patronage of an indirect but vital type.

* B. B. Gamzue, 'Elizabeth and Literary Patronage', *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*, New York, XLIX, 1934.
† George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesie*, ed. G. D. Willcock and A. Walker, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1936, ch. VIII, pp. 16–23.
‡ J. E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments 1559–1581*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1953.
§ Leslie Stephen, *English Literature and Society in the 18th Century*, p. 9.

Drama as a genre had important advantages for a prospective writer without a private income or continuous patron. It was relatively immune from censorship, and an actor-author could increase his income (approximately £6 10*s*. a play) by buying shares in a company, thus sharing in the costs and profits. Although actors were notoriously poor and of low status, those who could collect the funds and become 'sheavers' could improve their position considerably. Shakespeare was probably given £1,000 by the Earl of Southampton to buy four shares at the Globe in Burbage's company, and two at Blackfriars; he could retire in relative comfort. Yet even in his case there was not complete freedom of expression; the deposition scene in Richard II was omitted in early performances and editions, and in Sonnet 66 he complains of 'art made tongue-tied by authority'.

The four main institutions of censorship were the Court of Star Chamber, the Court of High Commission, the Corporation of the City of London, and the Stationers' Company. These kept a close watch on all writing printed or circulated. Printing was limited mainly to London, and authors and bookseller-publishers ran formidable risks if they disseminated opinions considered to be prejudicial to official political and religious policy.* The unprotected writer's position was precarious. Pirating was rife; severe penalties awaited the producers of treasonable or blasphemous literature. Kyd was tortured for an unorthodox paper found on him and attributed to Marlowe; a fellow undergraduate of the latter was burned to death for his opinions. On Raleigh's advice, Spenser laid *The Faery Queen* before Elizabeth; his subject, a legend of the age of King Arthur, was chosen as 'furthest from the danger of envy and suspicion of the present time . . . for avoiding of jealous opinions and misconstructions'. The moral censors have been accused of discrediting the whole profession of literature, of making writing suspect, destroying liberty and creating a climate of spying and provocation; despite this a literature of outstanding vitality and sensitivity developed.† Notwithstanding contempt and hostility,

* For further information on censorship, see Richard Findlater, *Theatrical Censorship in Britain*, London, Panther, 1967, and Donald Thomas, *A Long Time Burning* (A History of Literary Censorship in England), London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969.
† Phoebe Sheavyn, op. cit.

writers emerged from all classes, offering works characteristic of the age: at times sordid and brutal but containing a critical questioning of values, a gusto, a lyrical power of remarkable quality. Adverse patronage conditions, in an age of economic and social expansion, cannot repress curiosity and a reassessment of values conducive to literary creativity. In England a flourishing drama, together with some educational opportunity, encouraged writers to develop in a climate of change and growth. Society was still sufficiently cohesive for them to achieve a totality in their work by expressing the hopes, fears, and world views of the various social classes and groups with whom they were in touch.

2

The Civil Wars brought a serious dislocation to aristocratic patronage. Milton (called by some the first professional writer) and other puritan authors survived. The Restoration brought an initial return but at the end of the century we find professional writers such as Johnson dispensing with private patronage and turning to widening reading publics mediated by a developing market situation. This included innovatory schemes, such as subscription publishing, for selling books. Lending libraries were developing and a new journalism helped out the freelance writer. The Copyright Law of 1710 enabled authors to own bargainable property, suppressing piracy. The eighteenth century represented a fundamental shift in sponsorship for authors, in the direction of publishers catering for a growing reading public.*

Between 1688 and 1721 a peculiar type of patronage, which placed writers in a favourable position, became prevalent. Ministers of State, in particular Harley and Bolingbroke for the Tories, Dorset and Montague for the Whigs, paid authors well to write polemics, to celebrate or denigrate suitable events and personages. The House of Commons was now a powerful institution, with Ministers in a dominating position employing authors and rewarding them with regular salaries and pensions,

* A. S. Collins, *Authorship in the Days of Johnson Being a Study of the Relation between Author, Patron, Publisher and Public, 1726–1780* London, R. Holden and Co., 1927, ch. 4.

lucrative posts, and protection. Writers were given a new role and could command a price; Halifax saw the 'Trimmer' as performing a useful social function 'to preserve a Mean between Barbarous extremes . . . directed to Principles in reference to the public . . .[who] will neither be Bawled, Threatened, Laught or Drunk out of them'.* The writer's position, it was alleged, had returned to that prevalent in Augustan Rome; he was seen as 'one who keeps even the ship of state', rather than trimming between opposing parties according to his own interests.

Time-serving and impoverished hacks continued to exist, but some writers followed their own interests with integrity. With the development of the party system conflict on certain issues and interests varied. The interests of the Court Party and the Country Party often cut across the Whig and Tory dichotomy: Whigs and Tories were in both groups. The Crown and its ministers tried to enlist support by sharing administration over roughly a hundred M.P.s who formed the Court Party. The landed gentry, the Country Party, were not necessarily in opposition to the Court Party, but they would oppose certain policies, particularly taxation on their estates.† Their political allegiances might vary: the Jacobite Tory Squire Western vows he'd be 'anything than a courtier, and a presbyterian and a Hanoverian too', while Tom Jones swears that 'the cause of King George is the cause of liberty and true religion'. Both would be for the Country Party's interests. Fielding himself had the attitudes of 'a good old-fashioned Whig, with an intense aversion to papists and foreigners, and a slightly superstitious veneration for trial by jury and Habeas Corpus'.‡ The religious spectrum further complicated matters. Swift switched from writing for the Whigs to the Tories, on account of the Whigs' alliance with dissent; Defoe's support of the Dissenters, Dryden's and Pope's of the Catholics, affected their political considerations.

There was, therefore, a whole complex of bargaining arrangements; writers' choice of patrons varied more with interest or judgement than with party alignments. A pamphleteer like

* George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, *The Character of a Trimmer*, London, James Duncan, 1833.
† A. R. Humphries, *The Augustan World*, London, Methuen University Paperbacks, 1961, p. 104.
‡ Leslie Stephen, quoted in A. R. Humphries, op. cit., p. 112.

Defoe was not necessarily corrupt or inconsistent in writing first for one side and then another; political patrons turned to writers for particular issues, finding skilled satire and lampoonery useful. In a society still relatively small – London only numbered 500,000 inhabitants in 1700 – private jokes and skits were easily decoded by the intimate reading and theatre public. But unscrupulous or needy writers would write for the highest bidder.

After the Restoration of the monarchy in 1688, two theatres reopened; these flourished, catering for a small court audience, until the Licensing Act was passed following a controversy over the unbridled character of Restoration drama. Unlike the Elizabethan theatre the audiences were not representative: their public, insufficient to fill both theatres together, consisted of courtiers and their satellites, noblemen, fops, beaux, wits and would-be wits, courtesans, and masked prostitutes. The Theatre Royal was ultra-monarchist while the Duke's Theatre tended more to Protestant sympathies, patronized by the Duke of York; for both the King's approval was essential, the theatre being the toy of the Court. Dramatists reacted from puritanism and turned instead to contemporary Spanish drama and to Roman and French classics. Elegance of dialogue embraced personal satire in the 'comedy of manners'; private court jokes were expressed in bawdy and colourful settings. In the midst of these productions the audience talked, quarrelled, drank, and groomed themselves. As the eighteenth century progressed this intimacy was dispersed; more theatres were opened for middle-class audiences. Unbridled burlesques gave way to masques, opera, domestic and sentimental drama. Heavy censorship was introduced after 1737.

A further opening for writers, alleviating the need for sustained patronage, was the development of journalism: newspapers, magazines, and reviews were published and circulated among the clientele of the growing number of coffee-houses and clubs, and to private families in town and country. The *Tatler* and the *Spectator* were produced as often as three times a week; these were read aloud in the coffee-houses, of which there were over 3,000 in London in 1708. The exclusive preserves of men (unlike the French *salons*), they were centres of gossip and news. Here writers met with political patrons, or read their

work to admirers. Journalism developed within their orbit, providing a new type of sponsorship for authors.

Political satire needs a measure of freedom, adequate sponsorship, the background of large cities, and some sophistication in an audience which is closely-knit enough to understand the disguised shafts and nuances. Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* supported the government and attacked Shaftesbury and Monmouth in allegorical language understood by its readers. This style was far more effective than a direct panegyric of Charles II, whose private life was only too well known both to friend and enemy. Divine right of kings was no longer assumed; political change had become accepted; there was much floating discontent and some freedom of speech; the reading public was widening; and intense political rivalry existed between the political parties. All the conditions essential to political satire were present, and a large volume of such literature resulted, directly involved with public affairs and ranging from heroic narratives to scurrilous broadsheet ballads.* After Queen Anne's death in 1714,† and with the election of Addison in 1721, political patronage of writers declined; the new Prime Minister refused to use this weapon. Writers were turning to a new type of literature which was in demand by the rising middle-classes, many of whom were dissenters. Leisured women were an important ingredient of this new market: they favoured novels rather than political satire.‡ Augustan satire was increasingly supplemented by domestic literature; however, a brief revival of political satire took place in the 1760s and 1770s with Wilkes's periodical, the *North Briton*, and with Hogarth's caricatures. Hogarth was the friend of Fielding and the character of their social comment is closely connected. There is no doubt that the rise in social status of writers up to 1721 was connected with their value to politicians, which brought their affluence; thereafter some deflation was felt, particularly at the end of the century.

The situation in 1730 was described in Fielding's play *The*

* Mathew Hodgart, *op. cit.*, ch. 5, Forms of Satire.
† George II could neither speak nor read English.
‡ Alexandre Beljame, *Men of Letters and the English Public in the Eighteenth Century, 1660–1774*, ed. with an introduction by Bonamy Dobrée, London, Kegan Paul, 1948, Introduction, pp. xviii–xix.

Author's Farce. A poet joining a bookseller in Hell is asked, 'What news bring you from the other world?' The poet replies, 'Why, author's affairs go much in the same road there as when you were alive, Authors starve and Booksellers grow fat, Grub Street harbours as many pirates as ever Algiers did – they have more theatres than are at Paris, and just as much wit as there is at Amsterdam, they have ransacked all Italy for singers, and all France for Dancers.' Bookseller: 'I find things go swimmingly.' The new sponsor is now seen as the greedy bookseller; there is no mention of other patronage; the change in the drama and the rivalry of Grub Street are all noted.* The renewed economic uncertainty worsened the position of the minor writers until a more steady market situation developed. This enabled some writers to achieve professional status without private patronage.

The depressed situation of the hack writers – who had proliferated during the fruitful years of political patronage – made successful writers ashamed of their calling. Byron described them, 'with pens peeping from behind the ear, and thumbs a little inky'; writers as late as Byron and Scott insisted on considering themselves as gentlemen rather than authors, although it was the success of the latter which did much to re-establish the literary image. Dr Johnson was an important innovator in this process: after experiencing the vicissitudes of the literary struggle eked out by journalism, he sought patronage from Lord Chesterfield for his *Dictionary*. He addressed the plan of the work to him but did not receive the hoped-for monetary aid. After its publication in 1755 Chesterfield wrote two favourable reviews in the *World*: thereupon Johnson wrote 'the famous letter' in which he castigated the institution of late patronage:

> Seven years, My Lord, have now passed since I waited in your outward room or was repulsed from your door, during which time I have been pushing my work, through difficulties of which it is useless to complain, and have brought it at last to the verge of publication without one act of assistance, one word of encouragement, or one smile of favour. Such treatment I did not expect for I never had a patron before . . . Is not a patron, My Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the waters and when he has reached the ground encumbers him with help . . . The regard now shewn me by your Lordship, had it been early had been kind. But now it has been delayed till I am indifferent and cannot enjoy it, till I am solitary and cannot impart it, till I am known and do not want it . . . Having carried thus my work so far with so little help from any favourer of learning I shall not be surprised though I should conclude it, if less be possible, with less: for I have been long awakened from that dream of hope in which I once subscribed myself with so much exaltation. My Lord, Your Lordship's most humble servant, Samuel Johnson.*

This letter nicely represents the growing disillusion with private literary patronage. It was now possible for a writer to manage without seeking favours from the higher echelons of society, to negotiate directly with publishers who catered for a widening middle-class audience.† Literary works were becoming commodities to be sold on an open market, affected by demand and cost curves, as were other commodities in the capitalist world. The publisher emerged as the dominant risk-taker in this transaction and the writer's role as salesman took on a new character. The rise of the novel with its extended appeal is an important factor in this change.‡

* Pope's *Dunciad* (1728) and *New Dunciad* (1742) are further attacks on the book market.

* See also Johnson's 'On the mischiefs of following a patron', *The Rambler*, No. 163.

† Interim schemes such as subscription publishing were introduced. Johnson published *Lives of Poets* by this method.

‡ Muted forms of patronage continued together with the widening of the market. Johnson himself received a pension from Lord Bute of £300 a year in 1762.

6 The Professionalization of the Writer

I

The relationship of patronage was one of the set of crucial social factors which affected the complex situation of the writer and the character of his work: its genre, scope, content, and at times its subtleties and ambiguities. The permutations of these factors varied with the type and differential impact of this relationship. In a society where there was a concentration of wealth and of interest in the arts in a single figure or aristocratic class, where there was no sizeable literate middle class and no alternate system of distribution, sustained personal patronage was necessary.* As wealth and education became more dispersed, as the middle class developed to serve extending commerce and industry, alternative institutions for sponsoring and distributing literature grew up, increasingly free from censorship and insecurity. The theatre was an early alternative to personal patronage, although frequently depending itself on some figure of affluence for protection; journalism was another alternative, and direct negotiation with a publisher the final outlet. The eighteenth century was an age of expanding population, a swelling new middle class, and growth in printing and publishing. These changes altered the groups to which authors looked as sources of social norms and arbiters of taste,† and shifted the sources of remuneration. Circulating libraries emerged to mediate the demands of the growing reading audience; improvements in transport and communications enabled a network of these to penetrate remote rural areas and to reach industrial towns beyond London.

* R. Escarpit, *Sociologie de La Littérature*, Paris, 1958.
† Their 'reference groups'.

The writer was consequently able to develop a more prestigious self-image and to dispense with subservience to the idiosyncrasies or policies of an aristocratic patron – yet he still had to consider the tastes of a power figure in the person of his publisher or the owner of the circulating library, and he also looked to a wider audience whose demands and conventions might determine the sales of his work. Increasingly there was a choice of publishers to whom he could apply, and a variety of reading publics as specialisms in literature proliferated. Moreover, the range of alternate and alternative occupations which the writer could pursue to supplement his income was widening. Patronage in the form of personal spokesmanship still remained, and continues today in a supplementary form, but its essence had changed.

There were, therefore, pressures towards independence, but also to relative isolation: the writer became more autonomous but more alone: no longer was he integrated into an aristocratic family or given an indispensable role in a closely-knit social group. This position fluctuated: the short periods of political patronage reversed the process; and the relatively compact middle-class world of the novel and domestic journalism kept him in touch to some extent with his readers. The forces promoting his insecurity increased at the end of the nineteenth century, when the circulating libraries lost their hold, when cheap one-volume novels flooded the market, and when average literary remuneration declined. The writer was, then, more unprotected and open to the dictates of a competitive market while his public had widened and expanded to the extent of fragmentation. We see some of these changes reflected in the texts: in the twentieth century we find the personalized, subjective novel written in the 'stream of consciousness' style, concentrating on psychological depth, on microscopic areas of experience at the expense of 'totality'.

The nineteenth century was a favourable era for the author: particularly for the novel writer.* Some aimed their work directly at the popular reading public, their ambition being to write a best or better seller. Others employed more internalized

* Conrad Tanzy, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, *Publishing the Victorian Novel: A Study of the Economic Relationships of Novelists and Publishers in England, 1830–80*, Ohio State University.

standards and scorned the salesman's role. Both types benefited from increasing professional status, improved rates of remuneration, and from the efforts of specific figures such as Walter Besant who founded the Society of Authors in 1888. It was possible for the image of the writer to be reconciled with the Victorian ethos of self-help, 'respectability', and pecuniary stability. The writer could become upper middle-class by his efforts, and upper middle-class writers need no longer be ashamed of their calling. The hack writer 'ready for a guinea to write satires, epigrams, anything for or against either side or anybody', gave way to the self-made, self-respecting craftsman rising via journalism to regular lucrative activity.* Not all, however, subscribed to an establishment ideology. An interesting sub-group with atypical social origins – Scots, Irish, Jews, nonconformists, working-class writers – existed, frequently critical of conformism to a conventional middle-class professional image.† Withdrawal from societal norms characterized an increasing number of artists, from William Blake to Katherine Mansfield. These artists tended to feelings of isolation and subjectivity; their texts are inward-turning and not geared to maximum popular sales. Their reference groups are a select coterie or certain private canons of taste.

The last half of the eighteenth century saw important changes which accelerated during the next hundred and fifty years. The demand situation was revolutionized: reading figures soared as more literate consumers of books came into being.‡ At the same time technical improvements and innovations in the production and distribution of books were developing, with the publisher distinct from the bookseller and the printer, and emerging as the dominant middleman who negotiated with the writer to satisfy the tastes of the new public.§ Until the 1880s the lending libraries – Mr Mudie's in particular – employed the writer on contract to produce three-decker novels to be rented to families

* Walter Besant, *The Pen and the Book* (advice to authors), London, Thomas Burleigh, 1899, Introduction, 'The Life of Letters'.
† Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 240. These writers from 'new social groups' were responsible for much of the 'most original social thinking' during the nineteenth century, according to Williams.
‡ Q. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1932.
§ S. H. Steinberg, *Five Hundred Years of Printing*, London, Penguin Books, 1961, pp. 214–30.

with leisure on their hands. Book production became a capitalist business, as did many other specialisms, with a consequent decline of traditionalistic and personalized procedures. However, an element of the personal relationship of patronage remained in the at times fruitful and sustained contact between the writer and the better publisher. In the peak period of the 1880s vast fortunes could be earned by novel-writing. Dickens's estate was valued at £93,000 after his death; Anthony Trollope's mother educated a family on the proceeds of her novels.

2

The rise of the novel was one of the most spectacular events in the history of literary genres. It began in the early years of the eighteenth century with the writings of Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding. These writers no longer looked to the aristocratic echelons of society for sponsorship and readership; in a society of developing capitalism and a new middle class, they wrote for the families of the new commercial magnates as well as for those of gentry and farmers. They either negotiated directly with publishers or used the subscription system: collecting sums of money from friends or friendly booksellers who were in touch with the public taste.

Tales and dramas of adventure and romance had always been popular with the public at large, as were religious allegories in story form. *Everyman*, a fifteenth-century morality play of Dutch origin, was performed in various versions in many countries; John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* was a European best seller. The first edition of the latter, 1678, numbered 2,000 copies; by the time of Bunyan's death in 1688, ten editions by the original publisher, each numbering 4,000 copies, had been struck; while in the absence of copyright legislation many other pirated versions were in existence. This is an astonishing demand for a religious dream allegory by a Puritan tinker, written for an non-aristocratic audience without aristocratic patronage; it is rivalled only by the Bible. In Europe a secular literature was also spreading: in Spain Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote* in the picaresque tradition as a burlesque of the old romances of chivalry. His story developed into a critique of the values of

contemporary society, with the character of the hero deepening and intensifying. It was translated into English as early as 1712; pirated versions had a wide circulation and impact. Other less serious romances from Italy, France, and Spain were also distributed; an example is *Gil Blas*, another series of adventures of a rogue-hero in the picaresque style.

There was an increasing demand for non-religious entertainment and for allegories of quest and excitement containing some assessment of current norms and values, familiarizing readers with unknown layers of society and types of character. But book prices remained high, there was no adequate copyright protection, and censorship was punitive. In mid seventeenth-century England the book-buying public numbered only tens of thousands; small indeed when we consider the swelling sales of the nineteenth century. Less than one in twenty read a newspaper.* By 1801 the population was 10½ million, multiplying itself three and a half times by 1901 to become 37 million. The average annual publication of new books, excluding pamphlets, grew nearly fourfold between 1666 and 1802. From 1666 to 1756 it averaged less than 100 a year; from 1792 to 1802, it averaged 372. Illiteracy and semi-illiteracy, caused by inadequacies of education, poverty, lack of leisure, and the high price of books, delayed the growth in demand until the second half of the eighteenth century. The surveys of both Gregory King (1696) and Defoe (1702) indicate that the majority of the population were living in extreme poverty, unable to afford schooling, newspapers, and books. The original price of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) was 5*s*. a copy; working-class income averaged between £6 and £20 a year, that of the roughly 2 million small freeholders and farmers, shopkeepers, tradesmen, and artisans was £38 to £60 a year. Consequently the price of novels, even when sold by the sheet, was beyond the means of the bulk of the population. *Tom Jones* cost more than a labourer's weekly wage: this contrasts sharply with the price of a ticket for the Globe theatre in the time of Shakespeare, which was one penny, the cost of a quart of ale.

An undergrowth of literature existed for the poor and semi-educated; this encouraged reading skills. From feudal times

* Marjorie Plant, *The English Book Trade, An Economic History of the Making and Sale of Books*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1939, ch. 12.

pedlars and travelling chapmen had dispersed a scattering of cheap pamphlets, receipt books, practical manuals, accounts of murders, ballad sheets, pirated romances, and religious or political polemics, either openly or secretly for a few pence to villagers and homesteads. As towns and markets developed these were available on stalls or in shops. By 1744 bookshops were increasing: in that year John Newberry opened a shop in St Paul's Churchyard, stocking only children's books: reading instructors, tales of entertainment, and homilies. A demand for specialist literature was fostered by puritanism and commerce; particularly among the lower middle classes and 'earnest artisans'. Books of information about science and travel, together with scurrilous broadsheets and Mademoiselle de Scudéry's translations of French romances, were embellished by new techniques of illustration, such as woodcuts.

The development of the newspapers was another incentive to literacy. Periodical pamphlets or 'Corantos' ('currents of news') first appeared in the seventeenth century. These were followed by newsbooks and newsletters sent periodically to subscribers. Gazettes, magazines, and newspapers increased in number after 1695 when Parliament declined to renew the 1662 Licensing Act which limited the master printers to twenty. Thrice-weekly mail posts made the establishment of some daily and provincial newspapers and periodicals possible between 1695 and 1730. But government fears of sedition were expressed by the oppressive Stamp Duty, the advertisement tax, and paper duties, which kept up prices and restricted circulation. To overcome expense, readers were employed in coffee-houses: for a penny, foreign or domestic news, romances, novels, and satiric poems could be relayed. Hence book and newspaper sales give but little indication of the size of readership at this time.

The rise of capitalism produced a structural shift in society. Division of labour increased and the 'new' middle classes emerged alongside the 'old' occupations of the Church, the Army, and the Law. Entrepreneurs, merchants, and shopkeepers increased in number, and new professions were born: doctors, dentists, accountants, specialized businessmen, bookkeepers, clerks, master builders, engineers, factory managers; many were nonconformist in religion and outlook. Individualistic, frugal, careful, and ambitious, gaining affluence by their own

efforts, they set up homes in which wives, daughters, and servants had leisure on their hands in a world where leisure pursuits were circumscribed. Here was a potential audience for the new novel: increasingly interested in the changing social world around them and curious about travel, crime, and even sex.

This new reading public responded instantly to the publication of *Robinson Crusoe*. Defoe was a merchant and a dissenter;* all his heroes pursue money, which he calls the 'general denominating principle in the world'. At this date (1719) there is no stress on romantic love; sex is subordinate to business. Self-help and industry are the chief concerns of the hero who has been called an embodiment of economic individualism.† Even God is depersonalized, becoming 'Providence' which brings blessings or retribution according to deserts. Marx noted the secondary quality of Crusoe's devotions: 'Of his prayers we take no account, since they are a source of pleasure to him, and he looks on them as so much recreation.‡ The novel portrays an isolation reminiscent of the self-reliant new middle-class entrepreneur in an increasingly secular and individualistic world of pecuniary struggle and manipulation.

Other novels followed, satisfying the public in other dimensions: notably domestic settings and adventures connected with worldly life and sexuality. *Moll Flanders* (1722) combines the contemporary interest in criminality with that of self-seeking and monetary aggrandizement – themes which would have been considered vulgar by an aristocratic audience. Swift had suggested to John Gay that 'a Newgate pastoral might make an odd, pretty sort of thing',§ and Defoe extended this theme. Moll, a thief and a prostitute, finally marries her seducer, a former highwayman, pooling their spoils. She spends her declining years in penitence and prosperity; thus squaring the puritan conscience, although in this case vice appears to escape its deserts. A reflection here of the developing capitalist values of self-help and strategic manipulation is evident.

Richardson, son of a joiner, himself a scantily educated

* He started work as a hosiery merchant.
† Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, ch. 3.
‡ Cited by Ian Watt, ibid., p. 84.
§ Gay responded with *The Beggar's Opera*.

printer, came on the literary scene almost by accident, tapping another vital interest of this new reading public, the position of women as regards the marriage market. Asked by two other printers to prepare a 'little volume of letters in the common style on such subjects as might be of use to country readers who are unable to indite for themselves', he had produced four volumes of *Pamela* by 1743. Aimed at the new semiliterate public of servant girls and apprentices, it also attracted the families of rising businessmen, merchants, and farmers seeking gentility and entertainment. Pamela, a young serving girl whose mistress has just died, is pursued by the son of the house. She shows considerable ingenuity in avoiding seduction, finally manipulat- a marriage with him. Later she suffers with dignity the fate of a profligate husband. Fielding lampooned this novel in *Joseph Andrews*; although the obvious butt of readers from the gentry, it had considerable influence. Vividly portraying the difficulties of an unmarried girl of poor background in a changing society, its popularity among women readers is not surprising. Moreover, Richardson stood for moral reform: the book is a critique of the standards of the previous Restoration age and of the still existing rakish squirearchy. But Pamela's foresight was named hypocrisy and scheming by the 'anti-Pamelaists'; and Richardson was criticized for his frank treatment of sex in an age becoming progressively squeamish as the influence of nonconformist Christianity became more pervasive.

The epistolary novel provided an intimate, 'key-hole' perspective in contrast to the formalities of some Augustan prose: the technique was repeated in *Clarissa Harlowe*, and by Smollett in *Humphrey Clinker*. Colloquial language which was familiar to its readers could be used; even Diderot describes his surprising empathy with Richardson's characters. Dr Johnson considered *Clarissa Harlowe* 'the first book in the world for the knowledge it displays of the human heart',* and Rousseau wrote, 'no one, in any language, has ever written a book that equals or even approaches Clarissa'. Richardson's readership extended beyond his own class; his work had considerable social and literary repercussions.

The first circulating library was established in London in

* Johnson also called Richardson 'the greatest genius that had shed its lustre on the path of literature'.

1740. For a subscription of half a guinea to a guinea a year, books could be borrowed at the rate of a penny a volume, threepence for the usual three-volume novel. The success of this scheme was an incentive to novelists. Families could share out the volumes or read them aloud in the household. Literary prudery was insisted on by publishers with this market in view. The necessity of spinning out the novel to three volumes contributed to the leisurely pace of early novels; 'padding' is noticeable in the inferior works that were circulated alongside those of acknowledged masters – these became increasingly common as the nineteenth century progressed. The 'Queens of the Circulating Libraries'* grew affluent on the proceeds of what George Eliot called 'Silly novels by Lady Novelists'.† But a feature of the times was the popularity of good writers, of Jane Austen, George Eliot, Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray, who had a wide readership and were responsive to its interests. Their concern for the tastes of their public did not as yet necessarily result in a lowering of quality.

Religious works were still the largest category of books published in the eighteenth century. But the ratio of religious publications per head was falling, although they were still dominant in 1851.‡ Novels gained a numerical dominance of the market at the end of the nineteenth century. A taste for them was fostered by the family magazines – the *Tatler* (1709) and the *Spectator* (1711), which appeared thrice weekly and daily respectively. These catered for the middle-class domestic audience who were potential novel readers. Articles, stories, skits, and poems were provided: the series based on the activities of Sir Roger de Coverley is similar to the anecdotal novel of character, appearing in parts, which was developing at the time. Other literary journals included the *Rambler* (1749–52), mostly written by Johnson himself. Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759) was a didactic allegorical romance written in a week to pay for his mother's funeral: it achieved considerable success.

* Alan Walbank, *Queens of the Circulating Libraries:* selections from Victorian Lady Novelists 1800–1900, London, Evans, 1950.
† George Eliot, 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists', *Westminster Review*, London, 1856.
‡ R. D. Altick, 'The Sociology of Authorship', *New York Public Library Bulletin*, 1962; D. F. Laurenson, 'A Sociological Study of Authorship', *British Journal of Sociology*, September 1969.

In contra-distinction to this tendency to offer entertaining leisure reading for increasingly commercial and worldly tastes, providing realistic detail, characters, and plot, there was also a movement away from reality, stemming from the Romantic movement and shewing a revulsion for the values of capitalism such as self-help, thrift, 'common sense', pecuniary profit-making. This expressed itself in the vogue for 'Gothic' novels in the 1790s. We have forewarnings in the lengthy dwelling on death and funerality in *Clarissa Harlowe*. Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764), the novels of Mrs Radcliffe, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) catered for this taste, which was shared both by the aristocracy and serving girls. This was a literature of escape: for those bored with drudgery as well as those fearful of encroachment by the new commerce. Romanticism had repercussions in both conservative and radical ideologies; the romantic writers such as Byron and Shelley developed a self-image of a fighter for popular freedom against clogging conventionality and established authority; others tended to heroic élitism with anti-popular connotations. Later, Romanticism came to be connected with a tendency to extremism, the image of a search or journey, and with a struggle to achieve personal or national identity. These themes had an influence on both realist and escapist novels, the latter being media in which repressed elements could find expression, elements denied in the new society.

Important influences in the new novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were, therefore, tendencies both to realism and to romantic escapism, reflecting economic and commercial changes in society. Often these are intertwined in the same novel: in Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir*, and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, for example. Extreme escapist novels were often ludicrous and were satirized by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey*. The works of the poets Shelley, Keats, and the early Wordsworth was of a different order, stressing imagination in an increasingly mercantile world. Elements of romanticism are strong in the novels of Scott, Dickens, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Disraeli; they intensify in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, and appear, debased, in the 'silver-fork' novels of 'high life' in the nineteenth century, by such writers as Bulwer Lytton. Romanticism is also a strong element of the writings of the aesthetes:

Oscar Wilde, Swinburne, and others. There are obvious links between these manifold tendencies and the changing character of society; revulsion against capitalism led to literary flights into fantasy, irrationality, or imagination.

A greater volume of reading material was accompanied, then, by a diversification of subject matter; but increasingly the nineteenth century became the era of the novel, the majority of novelists being women. Research shows that of all writers, the female ratio varied from about a fifth to a quarter between 1800 and 1935. Writing was a congenial occupation for women circumscribed by domesticity or by the absence of other opportunities. The fact that – unlike men – women did not have much formal education until the turn of the century indicates that feminine qualifications for authorship are complex. Domestic help, the absence of other outlets, and the growing prospect of gratifying monetary reward are obvious motives. In addition there appears to have been a peculiar combination of precipitating factors such as Protestantism, constricted and emotionally cool upbringing. Women were able to use their own subjective domestic situation as raw material, turning their constrictions to advantage. In the present century more women took alternative jobs in teaching and journalism. But writing remains a favourite occupation: support by a husband taking the place of the small private income stressed by Virginia Woolf as an essential prerequisite.* The dominant numerical position of women in the reading population as a whole contributed to the popularity of the novel during the nineteenth century. A stream of novels – some on a high level, others of interest now only to the social historian – were written, published, and read in the era before other leisure activities became available and popular.

The extension of the middle class was accompanied by some improvements in education. This increased the total number of literate people in the lower middle and upper working classes. Notwithstanding the delays here resulting from religious dissension, there was a gradual trend to increased reading, influenced by free library provision and cheaper newspapers. John Wesley's dictum, 'reading Christians will be knowing Christians', was taken seriously by his followers and even the Tories realized the necessity to 'educate our masters'. State education was

* Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, London, Hogarth Press, 1913.

slowly introduced: Anglican and nonconformist schools supplemented the Grammar schools and private schools. As writing became increasingly a profession, more male authors were drawn from the 'public'-school sector (which itself was growing).* Statistics of literacy are suspect because of inadequate criteria; information such as that 69 per cent of males and 55 per cent of females were literate in the 1851 Census tell us little about the quality of reading ability.† It is reasonable to suppose that the majority could read by the 1870s despite the poor quality of education which was neither universal nor free until that decade. The expansion of higher education is also reflected in authors' educational history; it contributed also to increased demand for certain types of reading matter. Writing skills over the population as a whole were improved by the introduction of the penny post in 1840, together with better communication and postal services.

3

Demand for and supply of books were therefore in a state of constant interstimulation throughout the century. But the book trade has always been cautious and technical improvements were introduced slowly. Caution had been necessary because of censorship and dangers of penalties for bookseller-publishers, printers, and writers. Defoe, for example, had been pilloried and his ears slit for his satirical pamphlet *The Shortest Way with Dissenters*. The monopoly by the Stationers' Company and the virtual limitation of printing to London, Oxford, and Cambridge, with twelve 'licensers' to censor books produced, had delayed developments. Cromwell had heavily censored new books and newsletters – well after Milton had produced his famous plea for freedom, the *Areopagitica*. The Restoration Licensing Act lasted until 1694: it was chiefly concerned with

* D. F. Laurenson, op. cit.

† R. K. Webb, *The Victorian Reading Public*, Pelican Guide to English Literature, ed. Boris Ford, vol. 6, *From Dickens to Hardy*, London, Penguin Books, 1960. See also R. K. Webb, *The British Working Class Reader* 1790–1848: literary and social tension, London, Allen & Unwin, 1955; R. D. Altick, *The English Common Reader, A social history of the Mass Reading Public 1880–1900*, Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1957; and Raymond Williams, op. cit.

religious sedition and blasphemy, but it also controlled the book trade. Parliament refused to renew it, following the objections of John Locke, yet the government continued to prosecute under common law, using informers. As late as 1713 a man was hanged for asserting in a pamphlet that James III was the rightful king. Journals such as the *Freeholders Journal* and the *True Briton* were suppressed by seizure of papers and type and arrest of printers.

Wilkes in 1766 challenged this practice, obtaining a favourable verdict; he also attacked the directing of juries by judges, which was finally abolished by Fox's Libel Act of 1792. Another impeding law was the Stamp Act of 1712, which forced up the price of newspapers; some working-class papers, such as the *Black Dwarf*, circulated clandestinely to avoid this. In general, interference with the press began to diminish over the eighteenth century; although in 1791 Thomas Paine had to escape to America to avoid prosecution for his *The Rights of Man*, and in 1810 Cobbett received a sentence of two years' imprisonment and a fine of £1,000 for denouncing army flogging. The Copyright Act (1709) gave authors property rights over their products; subsequent acts reinforced this, International Copyright being achieved by the Berne Convention in 1885. In this year the Stamp Duty also ended. Censorship of 'immoral' literature continued: libraries would take no book which infringed a strict code. An unexpurgated British edition of Zola's *Germinal* would have been unthinkable. Standards gradually relaxed over the present century, and books became increasingly similar to other commodities bought and sold in a competitive market.

Innovation in the book trade could not be delayed indefinitely. Refinements in printing type, binding, and paper were introduced with paper-covered binding boards instead of the flimsy paper covers which needed replacing by the private binding of the buyer. In 1814 the first newspaper was produced by steam; in the 1860s the web press was introduced, printing on a continuous roll of paper. In the 1870s practical type-setting machines appeared; at the same time more paper was produced, new processes such as chemical pulp processes overcoming the rag shortage. By 1900 domestic paper production had risen to over 650,000 tons, from 11,000 tons in 1800. Prices dropped from 1*s.* 6*d.* a pound to three farthings after the removal of

paper duties on exports; a change which was reflected in the price of books. Books became both cheaper and mass-produced; this had a crucial effect on the social situation of the writer. The circulating libraries lost their hold and the writer became freer – but more vulnerable: his remuneration both fell on average, and became less secure. Meanwhile books became more attractive to the mass market: new methods of illustration were introduced, such as lithography, engraving, and finally, photography. The realistic woodcuts in the 'blue books' – Royal Commission Reports – of the 1840s did much to increase their impact; and even the working-class *Penny Magazine* was illustrated. Middle-class magazines such as *Punch* employed well-known writers and illustrators. Dickens was first commissioned to write a text for Seymour's cockney portraits: the role of illustrators such as Leech and 'Phiz' had at times equal importance with that of writers, and the interaction between the two influenced the character of the final work.

The economic and social situation of book production, then, received a boost from a number of factors connected with the Industrial Revolution. New roads opened up remote country districts, fast mail-coaches carried newspapers, journals, and books to new shops in local towns; by 1850 the railways were becoming established. Printing, bookselling, and publishing became differentiated concerns with their own trade associations and organizations. The prolonged controversy between free trade and protectionist booksellers during the nineteenth century (the 'war of the booksellers') was ultimately resolved in favour of fixed prices – resulting in the Net Book Agreement (1899) whereby a book could not be sold at a price lower than that determined by the publisher. This prevented underselling and facilitated amalgamations between publishers, with larger networks bringing cost economies.

During the nineteenth century, if authors kept to the convention of 'titillation without sex' and avoided disturbing religious or political controversy, they could enjoy rewards on a scale never before reached. The publisher was emerging as the most powerful figure in the trade, employing authors and printers and organizing his business on bureaucratic and contractual lines. He had regular contracts with booksellers and libraries; books were advertised and received press notices; the

roles of agents and critics were being developed. The *Edinburgh Review* (1802) initiated a new era in literary criticism – and a lucrative second employment opportunity for writers. The distinction between magazine and review was more apparent: reviews such as the *Quarterly* and later the *Westminster Review* taking a serious intellectual and often a political perspective, while magazines such as *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *London Magazine* were miscellanies aiming at entertainment. Serial fiction appeared in the magazines: Dickens's novels appeared in his *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*; Thackeray edited the *Cornhill*. Other more specialized journals appeared, contributing to the diversification and fragmentation of publics apparent at the end of the century.* The nineteenth century represents an age when the web of intellectual activity was greatly extended; books and periodicals came to be reckoned in terms of millions rather than of thousands, and writers became suppliers of popular commercial products.

Defoe had already described writing as a 'very considerable branch of English commerce'. During the nineteenth century this description became progressively more appropriate. Popular consumers formed a market for a final product whose production had occupied a range of specialized workers – hence the flow of mediocre works which reached a public deprived of alternative comparable leisure commodities. This monopoly widened the audience for high quality novels: George Eliot, Dickens, and Scott provided an awareness of serious issues and some comment on the values of their time. But there were also openings for the meretricious and sentimental, which brought their authors rewards on a far higher scale than is possible to the same extent today. So whereas proportionately more readers read serious literature, trivial writers could make proportionately higher profits.

Until the 1880s, publishers usually used the system of outright purchase of copyright for three-volume novels suitable for the circulating libraries. This system particularly favoured the mediocre novelist who might lose on royalty payments; he could, by regular production, make a steady income and achieve some security. His position became comparable to that of a salary earner, the publisher acting as the entrepreneur and claiming

* Gross, J., *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters*, London, 1969, chs 1–3.

profit as his due for risk-taking. Many women favoured this method for its safety, although a best seller might have fared more lucratively on the royalty system. Sometimes profit-sharing or bonuses were granted on the second printing. The royalty system took over in the last decade of the century. Marie Corelli's *Vendetta* brought her £50 on publication, £25 when sales reached 2,000, and a shilling royalty on each subsequent copy sold. Less well-known writers might have to publish on commission, being responsible for promotion and cost of production; the publisher claimed a fixed share, usually 10 per cent of the gross receipt. Mrs Henry Wood's *East Lynne* was published in this way; it proved a best seller although rejected by George Meredith, the reader for Chapman & Hall. The outright sale of the three-volume novel was mourned by many after it had disappeared; although Gissing portrays the system as a form of coercion. The writer had to provide three hundred pages a volume with twenty lines to a page, the total list price was 33*s.* 6*d.*, and no offence to the taste and predilections of Mr Mudie and his colleagues was allowed.*

Some authors could avoid this system if they had alternative income or great success, persuading publishers to back one-volume novels, or editors to publish in monthly parts or in magazines. But great novels were written within its confines; George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1858) was written as a three-decker, earning £800 for the copyright for four years. Mudie later increased his supply from 500 to 1,000 copies when success was assured. Three thousand copies of *The Mill on the Floss* were ordered by Mudie. By 1871, Lewes was writing to Blackwoods, 'Mrs Lewes finds that she will require four volumes for her story not three.' Blackwoods then accepted a royalty agreement of 2*s.* for each copy sold of *Middlemarch*, recognizing its quality and the necessity for the author to get 'out of Mudie's clutches'. Mudie threatened to burke the novel; however, its success, selling at 5*s.* a part, was such that he finally ordered 1,500 copies of the four-volume edition. After 1876, George Eliot gained control of her earlier novels which she had 'leased' to Blackwood's for ten years; she obtained royalty agreements on them

* George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, London, Penguin Books, 1968. This is praised by Q.D. Leavis as 'a major contribution to the English novel', in *Scrutiny*, June 1938.

all. The 'Cabinet' edition of her work brought her £4,330 in royalties alone.* Hence a successful writer might benefit from the three-decker system initially, gaining popularity and renown by means of which he might finally escape from it. Many widows, however, valued its advantages, since it provided a steady income, useful for rearing and educating a family.

But at the end of the century came an important change which resulted in a fundamental shift in the authors' position. During the 1890s publishers began to issue a cheap one-volume edition of a three-decker novel at 6*s*. This badly undermined the position of the libraries, who in retaliation broke the system: in 1894, 184 three-volumes novels appeared, in 1897 only four.† Cheap reading matter provided on railway stations also challenged the monopoly of the private lending libraries – these were being increasingly threatened by the free libraries. The public was becoming interested in a freer type of literature: George Moore's *A Modern Lover*, in which a girl poses in the nude for the artist-hero, was followed by *A Mummer's Wife*, published by Vizetelly for 6*s*. in a single volume. Shorter, cheaper novels were now popular, religious sanctions were losing ground, and a new approach to reading was evident: an audience was developing which was to appreciate Hardy and D. H. Lawrence. The new perspective had important repercussions on the length of novels – they were no longer lengthy family sagas. Since royalties could no longer be assessed in advance, these changes brought insecurity to the author and the gap widened between writer and public with the disappearance of the private lending libraries.

4

Throughout history many writers have held second jobs either initially or continuously. Dr Johnson has been called the first professional man of letters, Milton the first professional poet, and Defoe the first professional novelist: these writers were able to dispense with patronage by means of supplementing their

* Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968, ch. 13. This sum is worth three times its value today.
† Bernard Bergonzi, introduction to George Gissing, op. cit.

income by journalism. Others started in or continued alternative professions: Sterne began his career as a parson, Smollett as a doctor. By the nineteenth century it was easier for writers to live by their pen alone: Scott was able to recoup his fortunes by writing twenty-five historical novels in eighteen years. But few writers were entirely dependent on writing: some were priests or ministers, such as Charles Kingsley, Newman, Sidney Smith, Keble, G. M. Hopkins, William Barnes, and George Macdonald; others were academics like Ruskin, Mark Pattison, Walter Pater, Lewis Carroll, and Charles Reade. Public servants included Arthur Clough, Matthew Arnold, Macaulay, Lytton, Trollope, J. S. Mill, and Thomas Love Peacock. Among the barristers were Francis Jeffrey, Bentham, and Wilkie Collins. Walter Bagehot was a banker, Harrison Ainsworth a publisher.* Women usually had alternative means of support from family or husband. Many Victorian writers had private means: Grub Street had not disappeared for the unsupported although the quasi-patronage of the circulating library was available for those willing to conform to its prescriptions.

The improvement in the general status of the author compared with the previous age is stressed by Walter Besant.† Describing the struggling writer in the early eighteenth century, where 'every profession and trade had its uniform guaranteeing recognition and respect' he describes Grub Street:

> . . . Only the writer was to be seen all day long; he haunted the coffee houses, the eating houses, the taverns of Fleet Street and its neighbourhood. Alone among men he had no uniform, yet he could be recognized by his rags. Every body knew the company of wits in the tavern; they were notoriously, horribly poor. Notoriously they had neither principles, nor honour, nor dignity: . . . the world saw very plainly that they had no independence but they were the servants of the miserably paid – and the hacks of the booksellers.

Besant claims that by the end of the nineteenth century a striking change had taken place. He asserts that a struggling writer such as Chatterton would no longer be faced with starvation. As a 'bookish' boy he would read at home borrowing books from friends or libraries. He would attend school, where he

* J. W. Saunders, op. cit., pp. 175–6.
† Walter Besant, op. cit. This attitude did not last. By 1850 Carlyle was calling literature 'a morbid substitute for reality'.

could learn shorthand. He might then be put into a newspaper office, where he would be asked to report on meetings, lectures, and police cases – he would learn to 'pick up news and shape paragraphs'. He would write reviews and articles for magazines in his leisure. He might rise further through journalism, becoming an editor; outside journalism an honourable income could also be earned by an author who honoured his obligations and worked hard. The 'feeling that literature should not even be remotely connected with money . . . that it is beneath the dignity of an author to speak of money' is strongly condemned. Authorship had become a profession with the Society of Authors its professional organization. There were pulls and ties integrating the writer into bourgeois middle-class life which lasted until the end of the century: this provided him with an ethos resembling that of the Victorian entrepreneur and limited the scope of social criticism for all but those with exceptional independence and insight. For some, then, the ties of patronage had given way to a bondage demanding a renewed subservience.

Public respect for the man of letters was considerable. Carlyle's acclamation of him as a hero – 'our most important person' – citing the oddly assorted trio of Dr Johnson, Rousseau, and Robert Burns was not thought extravagant. The man of letters wrote articles and reviews to support himself rather than relying on cheap journalistic success and the three-decker strait-jacket. Browning, Dickens, the Brontë sisters even, were lionized when in London. There were pressures to despise philistinism, which was equated with the working class and radical agitation. Matthew Arnold quoted his father in the first edition of *Culture and Anarchy*: 'As for rioting, the old Roman way of dealing with that is always the right one: flog the rank and file and fling the ring leaders from the Tarpeian rock.' He added, 'and this opinion we can never forsake'; however, he cut the passage out of subsequent editions. The network of academic and literary families which spread after the expansion and reform of Oxford and Cambridge were firmly attached to ideals of education, civilization, amelioristic reform, freedom of the universities, and a public service open to talent. But they themselves were now entrenched within the hierarchic establishment, anxious to help the nearly literate in a paternalistic way – to save

them from drink, cheap excitement and dangerous ideologies.*

The minority group of atypical social origins sought to avoid this subservience, expressing criticism of middle-class establishment values.† But these deviants were not revolutionary. George Gissing, for example, wrote movingly on the evils of capitalism and poverty – yet in *Demos* (1886) he made a violent onslaught on the socialist movement. Samuel Butler, like others, attacked the hypocrisy of the established Church; but he was hardly an extreme radical. George Eliot undertook a stern sifting of middle-class values and norms; yet her *Felix Holt* was disapproving of working-class revolution.‡ Social problem novels by Dickens and Mrs Gaskell deplored many of the evils of industrialism but refrained from a contemplation of radical measures which might transform actual social structure. Victorian social novels retained an element of moralistic protestant paternalism towards the poor which is absent in the novels of Balzac and in Russian literature. The later socialism of William Morris and Shaw was Fabian middle-class reformism – the same limitations are evident in the works of Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells. Other dissidents such as the aesthetes withdrew from society into subjectivism and fantasy.

Sociological studies of authorship provide some information of relevance: such as that by the nineteenth century most writers were born into the professional middle class. Writers from the upper class became fewer, and those from commercial or business homes were in the minority.§ It is important for studies to be based on adequate source lists: often working-class authors are omitted, unidentifiable through the use of pseudonyms or the occupation of their fathers obscured by phrases such as 'of humble parentage' or 'unknown'. Much of the 'Salisbury Square' fiction was written by authors who cannot be substantiated.¶ The spate of minor novels designed for the 'slop shops of literature' in the early nineteenth century were written by authors many of whom have disappeared into

* Noel Annan, 'The Intellectual Aristocracy', in *Studies in Social History*, ed. J. H. Plumb, London, Longmans, Green, 1955.
† Raymond Williams, op. cit.
‡ Ian Milner, *The Structure of Values in George Eliot*, Prague, Karlova University Monograph, 1968, ch. 5.
§ R. D. Altick, The Sociology of Authorship.
¶ Published by Thomas Prest in Salisbury Square, London.

oblivion.* Paid by the sheet, with booksellers' prices as low as half a guinea for a manuscript novel, the writers of these shockers and novelettes were a reminder that, notwithstanding the general rise in status, an undergrowth of popular hack writers remained. Those with ambition and contacts graduated to a higher level of remuneration; more research is needed on those who did not. Some of these were women aiming for a part-time income. Novel-writing became an accepted role for women, an alternative to that of the governess, the dressmaker and the social worker. Many remained on the level of the cheap novelette; others who came from a background of education and awareness achieved more.

Social class and education are two important variables in the situation of the nineteenth-century professional writer: that is, the writer whose majority income came from writing. Increasingly they came from professional backgrounds and decreasingly from the country and merchant classes: this seems to have contributed to the loss of gusto and the growth of 'delicacy' notable in the developing novel. Up to Elizabethan times most writers came from the gentry class, their homogeneity strengthened by ties with Oxford and Cambridge. The period 1530–80 contained an increase of writers coming from families of merchants, tradesmen, and craftsmen; the link with the university continued. Most Elizabethan dramatists came from new classes not related to the old gentry; they benefited from grammar school education and wrote for more heterogeneous audiences, although the influence of the Court was strong. By the time of the Restoration there had been a swing back to writers from families in the nobility and gentry. From 1680 to 1730 these again declined, and more writers came from middle-class professional backgrounds, with an increase of Irish and Scottish writers. The period 1730–80 shows more representatives from tradesmen, farmers, and craftsmen, with a decline of those educated at university; there is also some peasant representation (Blake, Burns, Cobbett, and Paine). From 1780 to 1830 we see a swing back to

* Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830–50*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1963. J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770–1800*, London, Methuen University Paperback, 1969, and Margaret Dalziels, *Popular Fiction 100 Years Ago* – An unexplored tract of literary history, London, Cohen & West, 1957.

professional class dominance, the emergence of the woman writer, but an important minority remaining of tradesmen, craftsmen, poor farmers, and labourers.* The nineteenth century has been studied in more detail: studies agree that literary London of the coffee-houses and magazines created a climate favourable to the novel and more organized journalism. Middle-class professional families provided the bulk of writers, most of whom had university education and second jobs if they were men. This age shows maximum homogeneity of social origins; after the 1930s research is less adequate but there is reason to suppose that the social origins of writers have become more varied.

The fall in remuneration and security of the present century is reflected in the recorded social class of the writer. Up to 1961 the Registrar General's classification placed them in Social Class I; after that date they were demoted to Social Class 2, on a par with actors and musicians. In the nineteenth century a writer could write works of a high quality for a popular audience; in this century readership has fragmented into élite versus low culture, with a varied array of specialist reading publics. Writers work for films, radio, television, education, even advertising; these media command a popular audience who may not be consistent readers.† The division between artist and salesman has therefore become more marked; although few have the private means necessary for financial independence: second jobs are still important. The self-image of the writer has varied considerably; from romantic hero (Byron), to country gentleman (Scott), to market-oriented tradesman (Arnold Bennett), to the observing stranger (Henry James), to ivory tower recluse (Virginia Woolf) – these are but a few of the options. At present we see a movement to reintegrate the writer into society by means of State aid, Guggenheim scholarships, Arts Council grants, even sponsorship from industry.‡ The future of the literary role is enigmatic; the extent to which a writer can express a world view of some class or group with which he feels involved

* Raymond Williams, op. cit.

† Malcolm Bradbury, 'The Writer's Profession Today', *New Society*, April 1965, stresses the modern increase of the 'technocrat writer' and the decline of literary bohemianism and the aesthetic approach.

‡ See Malcolm Bradbury, op. cit.

depends to a large extent on structural factors in society. These also affect the orientation of the writer: in an integrated society the dichotomy between popular salesman and esoteric artist need not exist. The function of the novel as a medium for expressing a critique of society and of the social relationships within it remains assured, although qualitative assessment by contemporaries is problematic.

7 The Writer in the Present Century

I

A striking factor in the authorship situation of the present century is the total increase in book production. Paradoxically this has been accompanied by a fall in the status of the writer or man of letters. It is the purpose of this chapter to explore some of these changes.

Problems of definition and indices complicate comparison over time and space. The General Conference of UNESCO 1964, defined a *book* as a non-periodical printed publication of at least 49 pages, exclusive of coverpages. According to this definition novels printed in magazine serial form, such as those of Dickens, are not books until the parts have been collected and printed together. This can be conceded, but when we come to the modern definition of poetry or 'literature', boundaries are hazy. Figures given on different categories of book production therefore provide information of somewhat rough precision which give only an approximate indication of production changes.*

We learn from Escarpit† that world book production as a whole increased by some 40 per cent between 1952 and 1962. The U.K. increased its book production by 35 per cent, and was among the six 'publishing giants', together with the U.S.S.R., China, West Germany, Japan, and the U.S.A., producing over 20,000 titles a year. The U.S.A. is gradually taking over from Britain the place at the head of the English language group, largely because of its mass publication of paperbacks. In 1960

* Sources: *UNESCO Statistical Yearbook*, 1968; *Whitaker's Almanack*; *Bookseller*, London, 4 January 1969.

† R. Escarpit, *The Book Revolution: Books and the World Today*, London, Harrap, 1966, part 2, ch. 1, 'World Production'.

it was estimated that 1,000,000 paperbacks were sold each day in the United States. A paperback revolution has also occurred in Britain, which has broken the virtual monopoly of Penguins.

These figures are of books in general, considered as consumer goods. Further breakdown is less reliable; the inadequacies of

Table 1: Estimated World Book Production, 1955–67*

Continent	1955	1960	1965	1966
	Book Production by Number of Titles			
World total	258,000	364,000	450,000	460,000
Africa	3,000	5,000	7,000	7,000
America, North	16,000	22,000	64,000	68,000
America, South	9,000	13,000	13,000	13,000
Asia	70,000	83,000	85,000	95,000
Europe	131,000	163,000	200,000	200,000
Oceania	1,000	2,000	5,000	4,000
U.S.S.R.	55,000	76,000	76,000	73,000
	Number of Titles per Million Inhabitants			
World total	106	124	137	137
Africa	13	19	23	22
America, North	66	82	219	227
America, South	72	90	79	76
Asia	47	49	47	51
Europe	320	383	450	445
Oceania	68	121	286	223
U.S.S.R.	279	355	329	313
	Percentage Distribution of Book Production			
World total	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Africa	1·0	1·4	1·6	1·5
America, North	5·6	6·0	14·2	14·8
America, South	3·2	3·6	2·9	2·8
Asia	24·6	22·8	18·9	20·7
Europe	46·0	44·8	44·4	43·4
Oceania	0·3	0·5	1·1	0·9
U.S.S.R.	19·3	20·9	16·9	15·9
	Percentage Distribution of Population			
World total	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
Africa	8·3	8·5	9·4	9·5
America, North	9·0	8·9	8·9	8·9
America, South	4·6	4·8	5·0	5·1
Asia	55·0	55·9	55·6	55·7
Europe	15·2	14·2	13·5	13·4
Oceania	0·5	0·5	0·5	0·5
U.S.S.R.	7·4	7·1	7·0	6·9

* Source: *UNESCO Statistical Year Book 1968.*

Class 8 of the Dewey book classification are well known. However, if we assume, with Escarpit, that errors here cancel each other out, we find that there has not been a corresponding proportional increase of books in the 'literature' category in this country, nor in the U.S.A. There has been stability here in the U.S.S.R., China, and West Germany; while in Japan and France there has been a decline. In France the decline was 36 per cent to 33 per cent of the total, 1952–62. It is tempting to associate these figures with the alleged decline of the novel, but further breakdown of this category is necessary. Many other factors are also relevant, such as political policy and censorship, level of education, technological demands, leisure, social stratification, etc. Only a few countries distinguish novels from other forms of literature: of those who do, we find the U.K. heading the list with 4,000–4,500 a year, followed by West Germany – 3,000–3,500; then U.S.A. – 2,500–3,000 (upward trend); France – 2,500–3,000; Spain – 1,500–2,000; and Italy – 1,000–1,500 novels a year. The great majority of books published today are what Escarpit calls 'functional books', and therefore are not the concern of the sociology of literature. These are books mainly in the Dewey classes of Social Sciences, Language, Pure Science, and Technology. Seventy-five per cent of titles published annually, and about the same percentage of the total number of copies, are 'functional books', in particular textbooks. In countries where technology is developing and where the school-leaving age is rising, the reasons for this are obvious. The author of an accepted textbook is in a favourable position in a world where literary rewards are dwindling. Paperback publication is to his advantage when sales are considerable.

Within the total increases, fiction, ever unpredictable, showed a decline in 1964, an increase in 1966, 1967, and 1968, and a smaller increase in 1969. There was a steady decline of religion and theology and an increase of sociology and political science.

The growth of the paperback industry has been called a revolution. Since Allen Lane published the first ten Penguins in 1935 the figures have been spectacular: from 800,000 books in 1935 to nearly twenty times that number today. In the U.S.A. Robert de Graff bought the rights of ten titles in 1937 to form Pocket Books Inc. During the war a cheap novel of the size of a

uniform pocket found a ready sale; by the 1950s there was a mass market for Signet, Ace, Pyramid, Popular, Bantam books, and others in the U.S.A.; and Pan, Panther, Fontana, Corgi, and others in Britain. A minor slump in the mid 1950s was followed by further growth; Panther paid £3,000 for Mailer's

Table 2: Great Britain: Number of Booktitles*

	1963	1964	1965	1967	1968	1969
Fiction	4,249	3,957	3,877	4,163	4,315	4,405
Biography	548	714	707	841	902	850
Children's books	2,599	2,469	2,484	2,352	2,189	2,156
School textbooks		1,868	1,869	1,857	1,889	1,821
History	672	922	1,073	1,466	1,647	1,555
Medical Science	1,158	1,174	1,227	1,231	1,256	1,241
Sociology		488	525	541	580	584
Political Science	1,059	1,501		1,986	1,990	2,441
Religion and Theology	1,470	1,435	1,227	1,376	1,336	1,164
Total number of Titles	26,023	26,154	26,358	26,619	31,420	32,393

* Source: *Bookseller*, London, January 1963–9.

The Naked and the Dead in 1958; Corgi gave £15,000 for *Lolita*. New selling techniques such as retail display units were introduced and although competition from television was growing, most lines survived.* The decision in favour of Penguins in the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* case was influential; the James Bond novels produced phenomenal sales.† While Corgi paid £25,000 for Frank Harris's *My Life and Loves*, Penguin developed many non-fictional lines with success; today other paperbacks are beginning to explore the non-fiction market. Titles are now around 35,000 British paperbacks in print, total annual sales (home and export) are approximately 150,000 copies, the total in the English language per annum is in the area of half a billion. Titles which sold over a million include *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (around 4 million), *Dr Zhivago*, *The Kama Sutra*, *The Carpetbaggers*, Homer's *Odyssey*, Kitto's *The Greeks*, and *Aircraft Recognition*. Agatha Christie is a multi-million selling author – having been one of Lane's original ten in 1935.‡

* Although Ace disappeared, while Corgi and Four Square nearly succumbed.
† Pan announced that 20 per cent of their turnover was in Bond books.
‡ See Frederick W. Nolan, 'Paperbacks: A Small Format History', unpublished article, 1970.

Within the total increase of book production, both hardback and paperbacks, fiction figures are now falling.

The emphasis of this book is mainly on 'literature', and on writers of 'literature', particularly on novels, and on the writers

Table 3: Paperback Publishing in the U.S.A.*

	1961	1962	1968	1969
Total production of books in the U.S.A.	18,060	21,904	29,579	30,387
Total production of novels	2,630	2,942	2,811	2,717
Total production of paperback novels	1,044	1,239	1,432	1,277
Ratio of paperback novels to hardback novels	14%	31%	50%	47%

* Source: *Publishers' Weekly*, 1963 and 1970, New York.

of novels. A study of authorship in the nineteenth century would find the majority of authors – 70 per cent at least – classified as novelists: this does not prevail today.

When we consider the position of the modern novelist compared with that of the last century, one striking difference is his fall in average earning capacity. Other changes stand out, such as his loss of contact with the mainstream of his readers. Dickens, Trollope, and other nineteenth-century writers were in constant touch with their public; writing in serial form, they were able to consider audience involvement with their novels; Trollope killed off Mrs Proudie 'on demand' (overhearing a clerical conversation in the Athenaeum Club); Dickens constantly received hundreds of letters from readers, and even felt constrained to justify his separation from his wife to his public in *Household Words*, 1858. The circulating libraries, too, knew their clients' tastes, which they communicated to the writers in no uncertain terms; the code of the bourgeois middle class was not to be infringed. But as the century progressed, the market became less homogeneous; the libraries lost their monopolistic influence, which had been prolonged by the high price of books. The introduction of cheap one-volume novels opened the market, rigorous moral censorship declined, and heterogeneity resulted. Mass production and mass literacy meant that it was increasingly difficult to write 'literature' as a best seller. Kathleen Tillotson notes the change, pointing out that in the Victorian age practically all 'great' novels were best sellers; this situation

has altered in the present century.* The mass circulation of newspapers, reaching the never-equalled figure of 600 copies per 1,000 inhabitants, has drawn away novel-readers, and so have the other forms of mass communication: magazines, films, radio, and after 1955, television.

Table 4: Classification of Sample Writers*

Men		Women	
Novelists	56	Novelists	33
Novelists and other	24	Novelists and other	6
	80 (63%)		39 (89%)
Dramatists	8	Dramatist	1
Critics	8		
Specialists or scholars	17	Specialist or scholar	1
Humorists	4	Short story writer	1
Essayists or satirists	5	Writer of children's books	1
Biographers and journalists	2		
Diarist	1		
Sporting writer	1		
Travel writer	1		
Writer of children's books	1		
	128		43

* Source: 1 in 5 sample, 170 writers born or died 1860–1910 (D. Laurenson, *British Journal of Sociology*, 1969).

By 1900, novelettes and poems could be bought for a penny, with hardback novels available for five or six shillings. The spread of railway travel had produced a demand for light reading, and there was further diversification of types of reading matter and of reading publics as the twentieth century progressed. From penny-dreadfuls to stream of consciousness novels, the spectrum covered shockers, adolescent adventure stories, romantic middle-brow novels, the developing detective fiction, short stories, regional literature such as the novels of Arnold Bennett, Thomas Hardy, and the early works of D. H. Lawrence, and psychological novels for an élitist public, for example, the works of Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and Virginia Woolf. There was an increasingly sharp division between what the latter considered as 'high', élitist culture, popular

* K. Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties*, Oxford Paperbacks, 1961, pp. 20–21.

'middle', and 'low' culture, between writers who considered themselves as artists and those who unashamedly looked on themselves as salesmen. Middle-brow culture tended to reflect increasingly the values of late capitalism,* while subjectivity and an atmosphere of critical isolation became characteristics of works which might be considered as 'high' culture. The division was threefold; working-class reading matter, beyond practical manuals and pamphlets, still consisted mainly of 'shockers' and romances, a little-researched 'undergrowth' of literature. D. H. Lawrence, coming from the working class, tried to break these barriers, not altogether successfully.

The comparative affluence and prestige of the Victorian writer had disappeared. After the Second World War the contrast was remarkable. Richard Findlater made two studies for the Society of Authors; the most recent is a summary of a Research Services' survey under Mark Abrams (1965).† He notes the current booming conditions in the book industry: around 300 million volumes published annually in the U.K., thousands more translated and published abroad, the total exported – at present £50,000,000 worth, constantly rising, 100 million paperbacks sold every year. Moreover, millions of hardbacks are bought by local authorities for schools or public libraries, the latter now holding over 80 million copies, borrowed without charge nearly 500 million times a year.‡ 'Yet although the book industry is booming, book writing is not.' Only a sixth of all writers earned more than £20 a week in 1965, a tenth earned between £10 and £20, and almost two-thirds earned less than £6 a week. Almost half had other jobs; of those who earned their entire living by writing, 44 per cent earned less than £500 a year. Virginia Woolf's stipulation of private means and a room for a professional writer is still appropriate: the continuing high proportion of women writers may be partly explained by the fact that many are living on their husbands' earnings. It is true that a

* Some outstanding values of early capitalism, and many deriving from nonconformism, were thrift, self-help, frugality, protestant earnestness, and dislike of ostentation. At the end of the nineteenth century the new generation of entrepreneurs were enjoying affluence, conspicuous consumption, hedonism, and frivolity in their leisure.

† R. Findlater, *What Are Writers Worth?*, London, Society of Authors, 1963; and *The Bookwriters, Who Are They?*, London, Society of Authors, 1965.

‡ Over 70 per cent of books borrowed are fiction

nucleus of book authors, not necessarily the best, can build up small fortunes in ways denied to the popular novelists of the past, selling their work to the cinema, the theatre, the sound radio, and above all to television, but 'hundreds more, and these by no means the flops and failures, squeeze only a small dole for their work'. Grub Street, it seems, is still with us.

Table 5: Earnings of the Sixth of all Writers Earning over £1,050 per annum*

1964	Total book income	Royalties on U.K. and U.S.A. sales	Subsidiary rights
	£	£	£
Romantic novelist	3,160	2,582	578
Thriller writer (old)	2,487	1,484	1,003
Thriller writer (young)	12,528	987	11,541
Historian-novelist	3,106	1,180	1,926
Literary novelist	2,574	1,786	580
General author	2,292	695	1,597

* Source: R. Findlater, *What are Writers Worth*, 1965.

Table 6: Earnings of Writers from All Literary Activities*

	Over £500 a year	Under £500 a year
Primaries (dependent on writing)	56%	44%
Secondaries (not solely dependent on writing)	26%	74%

* Source: R. Findlater, *What are Writers Worth*, 1965.

The reasons for this position are many and complex. One writer attributes the decline to 'the whole classical system of English publishing since the 1880s of bringing out cheap books and paying the author royalties', which is against the financial interests of all but the most popular writers.* Jane Austen, who in 1811 sold fewer than 1,000 copies of *Sense and Sensibility* at her own risk, made £140 (£1,400 today). Disraeli, writing at the beginning of his career, made £1,000 (£10,000 today) from *Sybil*, and the same on *Coningsby*, selling 3,000 copies of each. On an edition of 3,000 today a writer could expect £375, assuming his novel to be priced at £1·25 and his royalty to be 10 per cent. Findlater notes that, whereas British publishers have

* T. Coleman, 'The Bookmakers', *Guardian*, London, March 1969. Coleman advocates higher book prices for larger returns to authors.

doubled the value of their turnover in the last decade, 60 per cent is from educational and technical books, and much of the expansion has gone overseas, bringing the authors smaller returns. The domestic market is shrinking and inflationary with 'too many books chasing too little space'.

The public libraries system is another factor which penalizes the writer. Nearly a third of the population are now registered readers; the old subscription libraries which brought stable remuneration for many writers have gone. The public libraries make 500 million issues of books each year; yet authors get no more than their royalties on the initial sale. Various ideas for remedying this have been promoted: the 'Brophy penny' scheme suggested that a penny should be charged on each book borrowed, to go mostly to its author.* This was discarded because it infringed the basic principle of the public library: free borrowing of books. Alternative schemes have been outlined by the Society of Authors and others.†

Findlater also blames the perpetual undervaluation and distrust of both books and writers in this country. Authors are forced to follow Byron's advice: 'Never trust entirely to literature.' He writes: '... the tiny handful of the top can keep rather more of their literary earnings from the taxman if they can catch the eye of a City group who will buy their copyrights – (as Bookers have done with the James Bond estate and with Agatha Christie Ltd), paying them an annual wage plus welfare benefits'.‡ But other writers must turn elsewhere. There are more opportunities for jobs in academic life and the mass media than in the last century; and there are signs of a new form of patronage in the form of government grants and scholarships.§

The position is bleak for the aspiring writer without means: some have predicted a return to a predominantly oral and visual culture. The conclusion that the novel is 'dying' today cannot be affirmed – novels of quality continue to appear.

* R. Findlater, 'The writer considered as a wage-earner', *The Times Literary Supplement*, London, July, 1969. John Brophy's suggestion is frequently revived in schemes advocated by A. P. Herbert, the Arts Council, etc.
† The Public Lending Right is under discussion as we go to press.
‡ R. Findlater, op. cit.
§ M. Bradbury, 'What Are Authors Worth?', *New Society*, April 1965.

2

The changed situation of the writer has occurred over a period of developing capitalism, and over a period of increasing loss of basic assumptions taken for granted by most people, such as national superiority, an acceptance of Christian doctrine and a belief in an ordered scientific progress. There has been growing uncertainty on two levels: on the national and political level, and on the level of personal faith. Political events since 1914 have brought doubts about the possibility of society's moral amelioration; these doubts are reinforced by psychoanalytic findings that man is not wholly a rational being, but is swayed and motivated by forces of which he is not aware. The writer is particularly vulnerable to this cumulative loss of confidence. He is interested in the values of his society as expressed in life and books; his ambivalence towards his role is increased with economic and social insecurity. Many of the novels of this century are concerned with the predicament of the uncertain writer in a hostile world over which he has no control. The subjective novel has taken over from the outward-looking literature of the last century.

We have seen that the 1880s were particularly favourable for writers in this country, although some, like Gissing, seemed to slip through the net of security. For many, integration into a bourgeois role was possible. The writer's life could conform to the Protestant ethic: by hard work he could win security and respectability. Writers such as Dickens, Trollope, and Thackeray did not feel themselves to be at the margin of social life, or resolutely opposed to the philistinism and structural absurdity of their society. They advocated reform and articulated certain social evils and hypocrisies – but they dined and fared well in a Victorian world which accepted and acclaimed them.*

The confident ebullience projected by many such writers reflected the confidence of the age, and the prosperity of the new middle classes in a time of growing industrial and commercial affluence. But in the 1870s – and Dickens died in 1870 – economic depression spread, lasting, with some temporary alleviation, from 1873 until 1896. England was losing her position of economic predominance and was facing rivalry from Europe and

* Marvin Rosen, 'Authors and Publishers, 1750–1830', in *Science and Society*, U.S.A., Spring 1968, discusses this situation.

America. Deflation in the heavy industrial sector was accompanied by general depression in agriculture. England turned to the Empire for new markets, and a new Imperialism developed – Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India in 1877. This gave capitalism in Britain a boost; foreign investment continued, together with a somewhat naïve jingoism that was rejected by many intellectuals. The aesthete movement, for example, stood against the hearty involvement and philistinism of commerce and imperialism; it included a number of Irish exiles who did not share British patriotic sentiments. The aesthetic writers, greatly under French influence, were opposed to social realism; inward-turning, they insisted on the superiority of art to nature. The movement represented a radical challenge to the ideas of the bourgeoisie, which it loathed, yet it did not seek political remedies. A cultivation of sensation and intensity – Pater's 'gem-like flame' – was reinforced by the influence of Baudelaire, Huysmans, and Gautier; a move to amorality produced a climate that had many ramifications in academic, literary and even religious circles. The trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895 proved the nemesis of this movement in England: the sentence imposed by an outraged bourgeoisie constituted a further blow to the image and prestige of the writer.

One obvious result of the depression in agriculture was the decline of the rural way of life. England changed from a predominantly agrarian society to an urban or suburban nation: by 1911 roughly 80 per cent of the population was living in urban districts. This swing is reflected in the content of novels and poetry; the changing way of life has been lamented by writers including Hardy, George 'Bourne', and Richard Jefferies.* Cities proliferated and grew: many novels portray the predicament of the author, at the onset of his career, struggling with feelings of anonymity and precarious identity that are fostered by urban life. On the other hand, new inward-turning writers such as Joyce and Virginia Woolf valued the anonymity of the city for bringing a tolerance to individuality, escape, and scope to live uninvolved with the bourgeois society they despised. Writers were increasingly seeing themselves as at odds with

* Ambivalence towards town life and values was expressed by Fielding and Dickens. But the modern city offers anonymity on a scale never before experienced.

society, the cosmopolitanism of city life facilitating emancipation from conventions and outworn traditions. Thomas Mann in *Tonio Kröger* (1903) stressed that being an artist precluded the enjoyment of ordinary human feelings:

> Literature is not a calling, it is a curse; believe me . . . It begins by your feeling yourself set apart, in a curious sort of opposition to the nice, regular people; there is a gulf of ironic sensibility of knowledge, scepticism, disagreement between you and the others; it grows deeper and deeper, you realize that you are alone; and from then on any rapprochement is simply hopeless.

This separatist image of the writer, rooted as we have seen in his ancient role, was fostered by Romanticism, but had become somewhat diluted in England by the economic success of the Victorian novelists. More writers now turned to it from choice or from necessity. Separatism brought a prestige and a means of bearing their precarious and isolated situation, although the opposition between art and life was not a universal assumption among English writers. However, writers such as H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and Shaw cannot be seen as part of this movement.

National confidence, which received an artificial boost during the First World War, dwindled further during the post-war years. Britain emerged from this war theoretically as a victor; in fact all the disrupting factors that had disturbed her prosperity and eminence among the European powers were magnified: foreign competition, loss of overseas markets and investment, tariff barriers, and an abandonment of balance between industry and agriculture. From 1920 onwards, rising unemployment and general economic depression formed a spiral culminating in the mass unemployment and slump of 1929. Heavy industry suffered most; there was a movement of labour to the light industries of the south. D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* gives some idea of changing conditions but in a context of his hatred of industrialism, which he saw as destructive to human feeling, spontaneity, and life. Lawrence disliked the Flaubertian concept of art cut off from ordinary living, but paradoxically, his cult of irrationalism and 'the dark gods' tended to a similar polarity. G. S. Fraser quotes a passage from a short story of Lawrence:

> At a certain time the men who are really living will come beseeching to put their lives into the hands of the greater men among them, beseeching the greater men to take the sacred responsibility of power . . . At last the masses will come to such men and say, 'You are greater than we. Be our lords. Take our life and death in your hands and dispose of us according to your will. Because we see a light in your face and a burning in your mouth . . .' Ah, but my chosen aristocrat would say to those who chose him: 'If you choose me you give up for ever your right to judge me. If you have truly chosen to follow me, you have thereby rejected all your right to criticize me. You can no longer either approve or disapprove of me. You have performed the sacred act of choice. Henceforth you can only obey.'*

Although these were not Lawrence's own explicit sentiments, he advocated a loosening of cerebral control and a surrender to feeling; we feel tendencies, in his work and ideas, towards the fascism which sprang from the economic chaos of the 1920s.

The failure of confidence in progress and enlightenment through science and reason was reinforced by the spread of psychoanalytic ideas. The material structure – economic prosperity, industrial affluence, and the old agrarian way of life – was shaken; so also was the faith in man's conscious powers and reason. There were forewarnings of this before Freud: in the writings of Nietszche and Schopenhauer, in Dostoevsky's *Letter from the Underground*, and even from Enlightenment France in Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*. The psychoanalytic stress on unconscious influences, on behaviour reflecting introjected childhood experiences and family dynamics, with its emphasis on dream symbols, had an important literary impact; it also reinforced a popular crude determinism and despair which ignored the positive aspects of psychoanalysis as a struggle for insight and integration. This contributed to the feelings of impotence and of menacing chaos discernible in the years between the wars, and may have strengthened the experienced need for salvation through power which is expressed by Lawrence and which found expression in the fascism between the wars.† More benevolent influences reinforced by psychoanalysis include

* G. S. Fraser, *The Modern Writer and His World*, London, Penguin Books, 1964, ch. 2, p. 90.

† Freud of course did not encourage the cult of irrationality himself. He writes: 'The voice of intellect is a soft one, but it does not rest until it has gained a hearing . . . This is one of the few points in which one may be optimistic about the future of mankind . . .' (S. Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, London, Hogarth Press, 1930).

an added depth to character and relationships in literature, an awareness of the complexities of motivation, and an attempt to add psychological realism to the broad social orientation of Dickens, Balzac, and Tolstoy. The influence of psychoanalysis pervades many writers who did not acknowledge it explicitly, for example, James Joyce, Henry James, Virginia Woolf, Joseph Conrad, Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, and T. S. Eliot. Likewise, psychoanalytic ideas today are part of the equipment of all writers, even if they question their validity.

John Gross writes:

> . . . that writers should have been politically conscious in the 1930s was inevitable; the only puzzle is why they should have been quite as apolitical as they were in the 1920s . . . During the years when communism was becoming a central issue for French or European intellectuals, when it was attracting leading European writers from Barbusse to Brecht, the English avant-garde simply ignored it . . . Whatever the reasons for this placid state of affairs, it made the sudden swing leftwards at the beginning of the 1930s seem all the more of an invigorating shock to those who took part in it. The literature of the 1920s had been peopled by largely passive figures: Tiresias, Mrs Dalloway, a succession of sensitive introverts, amused observers, melancholy pierrots. Now was the time to act; and if there was one thing which excited writers in the 1930s it was the idea of themselves as men of action. *We're Not Going to Do Nothing* was the title of a characteristic tract of the period (by Cecil Day Lewis) . . .*

Although the war literature of poets and writers such as Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves, and Siegfried Sassoon had revealed the realities of modern warfare this was followed by an apparent recoil from social reality. In contrast, the chief characteristic of the literature of the 1920s was an interest in the mainsprings of individual personality, in the enlargement of consciousness and in the sharpening of sensitivity. This shaped a new reading for an intellectual élite. A spate of little magazines – many shortlived – were launched to help this new literature. T. S. Eliot was assistant editor of the *Egoist*, Herbert Read editor of *Arts and Letters*, Middleton Murry of the *Athenaeum*. There was constant friction between the latter and J. C. Squire's *London Mercury*, which represented the 'hearty' literary movement of the era, beer-drinking and cricket on the 'Chester-Belloc' model. Orage (who had edited the *New Age* before the

* J. Gross, op. cit., p. 257.

war) returned to London at the end of the 1920s to start the *New English Weekly*, which launched many new writers.* Murry had founded the *Adelphi* in 1923 largely to establish D. H. Lawrence – who in turn attacked the magazine as 'weak, apologetic and knock-kneed'. The essence of the decade is given to us in Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (1928). This illustrates the changed character and tempo of society: the frenzied search for lost security and meaning in a post-war world where pre-war assumptions and sexual sanctions had lost their hold. Many of the intellectual figures of the twenties appear: D. H. Lawrence as Rampion, Huxley himself as Philip Quarles, Middleton Murry as Burlap, Oswald Mosley as Webley.

The 1920s saw the development of the 'new' Bloomsbury group: Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell and their husbands; Lytton Strachey, Duncan Grant, Roger Fry, Keynes, and Saxon Sydney Turner. Some younger members now gained admittance: David Garnett, Francis Birrell, Raymond Mortimer, Sebastian Sprott – possibly E. M. Forster and some others. The original group has been greatly influenced by a Cambridge secret society called the Apostles, and by the ideas of the philosopher G. E. Moore. The Apostles, described by Leonard Woolf, a member, was a discussion group of an élite and esoteric nature, demanding absolute candour from its members and with a tradition of banter.

> No consistency was demanded with opinions previously held – truth as we see it then and there was what we had to embrace and maintain . . . the gravest subjects were continually debated, but gravity of treatment was not imposed . . . though sincerity was . . . it was . . . a point of the apostolic mind to understand how much suggestion and instruction may be derived from what is in form a jest.†

All the original members of the Bloomsbury group came from or married into what has been described as an intellectual aristocracy: an élite network of Oxford and Cambridge academic, intermarried families, attached to establishment norms and principles of high-minded reformism, imbued with the values of the Protestant ethic even if they did not still profess its

* For example, Orage was the first London editor to publish a poem by Dylan Thomas.

† H. Sidgwick, quoted in L. Woolf, *Sowing, An Autobiography*, London, Hogarth Press, 1960, p. 150.

beliefs.* They were united by their belief in a public service open to talent and in freedom of access to the universities. The brothers of Virginia and Vanessa Stephen, Adrian and Thoby, were members of the Apostles, based on Gordon Square. Hence they were described as 'the Bloomsberries'.† By the 1920s, the two married sisters were still living in Bloomsbury, Virginia established as a stream-of-consciousness novelist, holding formidable evenings where new members were tried out, despised and discarded, or accepted. Their snobbishness and their assumed superiority were resented by many.

Clive Bell decries the stereotype formed by 'Bloomsbury-baiters', insisting that they were only a group of friends, that there was no 'movement', no doctrine or common language.‡ But D. H. Lawrence, son of a miner, wrote in a letter to David Garnett after a visit to Cambridge: 'I feel I should go mad when I think of your set, Duncan Grant, Keynes and Birrell. It makes me dream of beetles . . . I had felt it slightly before the Stracheys . . . you must leave these friends, these beetles . . .' Lawrence's stress on 'feeling with the blood' was incompatible with the intellectualism and nervous febrility of Bloomsbury. He was supported here by F. R. Leavis, who has done much to establish Lawrence as a major writer. Like Lawrence, Leavis sees the established order as hopelessly corrupt, but considers all active programmes to replace it to be useless.

Neither did the Bloomsbury group stand for trying to replace the established order; their formidable hold on the literary and intellectual life of the time was another factor restraining an active interest in politics among writers of the twenties. Virginia Woolf's novels are of the stream-of-consciousness school. The extreme subjectivity of this approach seemed inimical to active Marxist beliefs: its practitioners tended to be increasingly isolated and introverted, subject to physical and mental stress and, in the case of Virginia Woolf, to suicide. We can see how this movement was influenced by the aesthetic movement and by the view of art and the artist quoted from Thomas Mann. The

* N. Annan, 'The Intellectual Aristocracy', in *Studies in Social History*, ed. J. H. Plumb, London, Longmans, Green, 1955.
† For the first time by Mrs Desmond Macarthy, in a letter written about 1911.
‡ C. Bell, *Old Friends*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1956, ch. 8.

writer looked on himself as a being apart, possessed of a sensitivity superior to the majority, an observer and recorder of his own perceptions of the world: obscure, oblique, and ironic in his commentary on persons and events.

The decline of the gentry class to which many of these writers were attached via birth or education (public school and university) is an important factor in any understanding of changing values. The 'rentier' class was ceasing to have any real relationship with the land; the decline of agriculture and the rise of urbanization precluded this. A pessimistic and snobbish distaste for the new commercialism, for the urban proletariat and lower middle-class way of life, is characteristic of this group. Intellectuals coming from the gentry class felt particularly threatened. They derived anxiety from their parents; this was reinforced by the suspicion they received as intellectuals. English anti-intellectualism, always a feature of English cultural life, was fostered by the public schools. Many writers from this class reacted to these two sources of anxiety by mourning their lost rural roots, idealizing the lost organic pastoral society, or by attacking the new society, exposing its evils and hypocrisies (retreat or aggression). Combined, these feelings of loss and regret plus revulsion for the commonplace and vulgar are a clue to the values apparent in many novels of the twenties; withdrawal contributed to their isolation, apparent neurosis and lack of any coherent world view of writers – from Virginia Woolf to A. E. Housman.*

The sudden swing leftwards of many writers at the beginning of the 1930s was clearly influenced by the impingement of crude economic and political facts into the private worlds and coteries of British intellectual and literary life. Unemployment rose throughout the 1920s and hunger marches were organized through the streets of London. The Labour influence continued to grow: both in terms of gaining working-class votes (192 members of parliament by 1924) – and in terms of mobilizing sympathy from middle-class liberal supporters. But Baldwin's reactionary government produced the Samuel Commission on the coal-mines, recommending a wage reduction for miners in

* Another reaction was the hearty beer-drinking of J. S. Squire and others in a vain attempt to recapture the value of 'Old England'. See G. Orwell, *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*, London, Penguin 1957, pp. 21 and 28–9.

1926. This resulted in a wave of strikes and lockouts based on the miners' slogan 'not a penny off the pay, not a second on the day'. In May 1926 the T.U.C. came to the miners' assistance by calling a general strike; unfortunately the government had control of the radio, over which Baldwin's portrayal of the strikers as attackers of the community was broadcast, backed up by articles in *The Times*. A new alignment of values was presented to the 'ivory tower' writer: no longer was an intellectual literary élite facing crude bourgeois, middle-brow philistinism; another factor had come into focus, the oppressed and struggling working class. Withdrawal from politics became much more difficult for the younger writer, and a combination of a romantic Marxist-flavoured crusadism with literary activity was increasingly adopted. Most of these writers were from the upper middle classes and Oxbridge, many from the public schools, and their Marxist sympathies took shape accordingly.

The political situation impinged increasingly on the private worlds of writers as events abroad developed. Hitler achieved power in Germany and became Chancellor in 1933. The Reichstag fire and trial, and the persecution of the Jews in 1934 were ignored by many people in this country, but could not escape the condemnation of the 'intellectual élite' – even Bloomsbury was shaken. Leonard Woolf was a Jew: clearly the Nazi movement stood for a negation of liberalism and intellectualism. Stephen Spender writes in his autobiography:

> Hitler forced politics on to non-political groups . . . the intellectuals . . . through sympathy with their colleagues . . . acquired an intensity of vision and a fury in their non-political politics which the professional politicians did not share. The intelligentsia had more sinister reasons for understanding Hitler. These were the elements of pure destructiveness, of attraction to evil for its own sake, and of a search for spiritual damnation which had been present in European literature for the past century, and which were fulfilled in Nazi politics . . . The cultured Europeans recognized in this political movement some of their own most hidden fantasies. Hatred of it was deeply involved with their own sense of guilt.

And he notes 'critics like Virginia Woolf' (of whom he was a great admirer) 'who reproached our generation for writing too directly out of a sense of public duty, failed to see that public events had swamped our personal lives and usurped our personal

experience'.* Christopher Isherwood's early novels had given a picture of the spread of the Nazi ideology in Germany; the Spanish Civil War was an opportunity for writers to participate actively. Spender and others had already joined the Communist Party, if only nominally; W. H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, and Cecil Day Lewis were part of this anti-fascist trend. Ralph Fox, Christopher Caudwell, Julian Bell, Tom Wintringham, Humphrey Slater, and others actually joined the International Brigade, some to be killed fighting in Spain. But individualistic writers found it hard to come to terms with the outlook of the British Communist Party, or to concur with Edward Upward,† who asserted in 1937 that good books could from then on only be those written from a Marxist standpoint. Few read deeply into Marxism, the commitment to Stalinism by the Communist Party was hard to accommodate. Exceptions include Christopher Hill, historian of the Puritan Revolution and the producer of sophisticated studies of Marvell and *Clarissa Harlowe*, and George Orwell, who although educated at Eton struggled to understand the working class and working-class values. Orwell's pessimism about Soviet communism is expressed in *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty Four*.

When the Second World War broke out, writers experienced considerable uncertainty. A wave of pacifism had produced the 1937 vote not to fight for king or country in the Oxford Union, and the Russo-German pact of 1939 was hard to accommodate. Some, such as Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, and W. H. Auden, retreated to California: the former two to adopt a form of Eastern mysticism, the latter to return to Christianity. Spender resorted to the Fire Service and journalism, Orwell joined the Home Guard, and worked for *Tribune* and the *Observer*. Others were conscripted into the armed services – all felt the inevitable conflict of an artist in time of war. The horrors of the Second World War were on such a scale that the belief in short-term human progress, enlightenment, and morality was finally dispelled. The mass bombing, the revelations of the concentration camps, and finally the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, completed the disillusion with official

* S. Spender, *The World Within*, London, Hamish Hamilton and the Book Society, 1951, p. 190.
† E. Upward, op. cit.

explanations which had begun with the social and economic changes of the 1880s and 1890s. The writer after the war tended to reflect feelings of nihilism and pointlessness in a variety of ways. George Steiner notes how Beckett has derived from his personal association with Irish letters a distinct note of comic sadness. But he doubts whether Beckett is writing drama in any genuine sense; it is rather 'anti-drama', proclaiming in *Waiting for Godot* with painful vividness the infirmity of our moral condition: the incapacity of speech or gesture to countenance the abyss and horrors of the times.* William Barrett writes of this play: 'Nothingness circulates through every line from beginning to end,' yet it runs for more than sixteen months to packed houses in Europe because the characters are placed in a predicament which is our own.† We are too close to post-war literature to know which writers – if any – will be remembered.

The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre (where Bernard Shaw's plays were performed) gave scope for a new 'theatre of the absurd' by Harold Pinter, N. F. Simpson, John Arden, and others. In some of this drama it seems as if fragmentation has reached its zenith: Beckett's last play, *Breath*, contains only a living and a dying breath accompanied by a recorded baby's cry (performed three times). The anti-hero has been followed by the anti-play and the anti-novel: Robbe-Grillet's literary universe of objects expresses ultimate meaninglessness and 'reification'. However, the sixties show some renewed political committal in writing; translations of non-fiction works by writers such as Herbert Marcuse, Franz Fanon, and Régis Debray are available, and are accompanied by some social commentary novels: James Baldwin and Joseph Heller in the U.S.A. are examples.

The very act of writing can be compared with exile in that it involves a critical scrutiny of the assumed. The early Lukács writes that the modern novelist faces the loss of earlier certainties, recording the tensions between a problematic individual and a contingent world. These are resolved in an overview transcending the limitations of the protagonist, a final state of enhanced

* G. Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, London, Faber, 1961, pp. 349–50.
† W. Barrett, *Irrational Man, A Study of Existentialist Philosophy*, U.S.A., Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1958, p. 55.

self-awareness which may be termed irony.* It is this self-awareness which in writers like Joyce has been promoted by geographical exile; it enabled them to avoid feeling overwhelmed by the complexities of their experience – bringing them enough freedom to write. Such writers seek an environment which may itself contribute to their growing self-awareness, providing emancipation from provincial constrictions and shibboleths. Unfortunately for writers like Joyce, exile has only been possible over space and not time; if Joyce were writing today, the constrictions which still beset him in exile, in the form of censorship, would not have so harassed and distracted him. An exiled writer is often dependent on single-figure patronage or promotion to meditate his work with the home audience and market.

3

English written literature in North America developed in a situation where there was very little or no patronage by single figures to promote sales at home or in the home country. The earliest settlers were mercantile men of the English Renaissance, soon followed by men of the Reformation of a puritan biblical outlook. From the beginning, commerce and Calvinistic puritanism dominated the northern colonies: hardly an ideal climate for the encouragement of the arts. Although the spread of rival sects encouraged the production of theological pamphlets and the pioneer society welcomed practical manuals of a utilitarian nature, aristocratic and courtly patronage was entirely absent. Pirated books came from England to some extent, and there was some indigenous religious poetry, but 'Conversations with Muses that are no better than Harlots, which excite and ferment impure Flames' were heavily discouraged. In the absence of material encouragement, most writing was by ministers, schoolteachers, and women, and most of a didactic nature. In the southern colonies an aristocracy of a sort did develop among the larger planters; more descriptive and elaborated writing, which aimed at elegance of expression rather than at exhortation, found some market here, but it was mostly imported from England. Pennsylvania, the Quaker settlement,

* G. Lukács, *La Théorie du Roman*, pp. 70–89, Paris, Gonthier, Collection Mediation, 1968.

produced *Woolman's Journal* and the writing of William Penn, but the middle colonies had many non-English settlers, and the reading public was constricted. In all areas two distinct types of literature tended to develop: the one deriving from puritanism, on the 'otherness' of events, or spiritual significance of objects; the other stemming from the practical needs of the colonists, producing, for example, the writings of Benjamin Franklin. Sometimes these two tendencies fused – as with Mark Twain and Thoreau. Plays and novels were not admitted until the mid eighteenth century: feelings of unity among the colonists, stemming from resentment with England, then produced also a spate of political writing, often reflecting the ideas of the enlightenment, of 'right reason', and of science.

The position of writers in American society was arduous because of the small and scattered reading public, poor transportation, the lack of patronage, and the absence of a copyright law. A 'Connecticut Wit' writing in 1783 notes: 'as we have few Gentlemen of fortune sufficient to enable them to spend a whole life in study or induce others to do it by their patronage, it is more necessary in this country than in any other, that the rights of authors be secured by law . . .'* Connecticut was the first state to obtain copyright protection – in 1790 the first Federal Copyright Law guaranteed copyright in all states for fourteen years, renewable for another fourteen. This protected the literary property of writers who suffered from the absence of monetary gifts from patrons, sinecure jobs such as tutor or secretary to a literary figure, and privileges arising from being identified with a protecting upper class. Publishers rarely took the risk of paying for publication: the author paid and the publisher served as his distributor on a commission basis. The author often tried to get promises to buy from his friends before he embarked on the expense of publishing: almost all literary works before 1800 were published in this manner, with a list of buyers at the back. Publishers often went bankrupt; in spite of copyright protection there was little professional authorship before 1820. International copyright came in 1891. Hence the crucial role of journalism in the United States: writers relied more exclusively on

* Letter from Joel Barlow to the President of Connecticut Congress, quoted in W. Charvat, *The Profession of Authorship in America 1800–1870*, Ohio State University Press, 1968.

the journals and magazines than was the case in England. Throughout the nineteenth century the consolidation of the reading public by journals slowly enabled the writer to become more self-supporting.

Many members of the reading public were first generation immigrants trying to learn English. The short story and light magazine article met their needs and increased further demand for magazine reading. The magazine habit remains today: A German immigrant to America was amazed at the limited number of bookshops and the fact that newspapers and magazines seemed more important than books. In America, he states, the book has a 'somewhat patronized dependence on the periodical press', relying on advertisements and reprints in periodicals. The magazine takes priority and few households own numbers of books. Whereas in Europe 'book-printing in settled communities nourished thought', and the bookshop was the focus of the intellectual life of the town, in the U.S.A. printing was a factor of colonization and an instrument of active westward expansion. There was little leisure for book-reading and so the periodical press became dominant, supplemented by the public library. The magazine became 'the characteristic expression of American Democracy'.*

Until the 1880s, then, writers were part-time amateurs or if, as in the case of Edgar Allan Poe (1809–49), they attempted literature as a profession, they suffered extreme poverty – eked out by journalism. The Puritan climate, particularly in New England, restricted their field: much English Restoration literature, for example, was proscribed. New England, originally a theocratic community, was the centre of American transcendentalism, a potent influence which still survives.† This literature was introspective and symbolic; later inroads were made on religious belief but the symbolic emphasis remained. Subjects of human love and relationships were not encouraged: man is seen as a lonely figure struggling with elemental forces – frequently of a sinister Gothic kind. Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* shows this transcendental influence. The increased publi-

* Lehmann-Haupt *et al.*, *The Book in America – A history of the making and selling of books in the U.S.A.*, New York, R. R. Bowker & Co., 1952.
† See L. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1967, Introduction.

cation of magazines, together with a slowly widening reading public after 1850, began to encourage increased openings for literary activity. But there was no market situation in the United States comparable with that in England in the nineteenth century, and writers were not attached to the perspective of a social class, as in a more traditional society.

A feature of American literature is a fondness for violence and death which is expressed within an adolescent and even homosexual context. Heterosexual relationships are either absent, denigrated, or sentimentalized. These tendencies can be discerned in a stream of imaginative and impelling 'anti-novels' of the highest intensity, such as *The Scarlet Letter*, *Moby Dick*, *Billy Budd*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, and the stories of Edgar Allan Poe. Philip Rahv points to two polar influences in American writing: the 'redskins' or lowbrows, reflecting the world of the frontier and war, anti-intellectual and masculine – and the 'palefaces', stemming from the sensitive symbolic culture of New England, of the cities of Boston and Concord. In the twentieth century, he alleges, the redskins, led by Dreiser, Lewis, Wolfe, Caldwell, Sandburg, Steinbeck, Farrel, and Saroyan, managed to overthrow the palefaces. Certainly a change came when a wider reading had developed, together with growing organization and affluence of publishers, protected now from pirating by copyright laws.* The often brutal conditions of the immigrants in the industrialized cities, together with the wretched plight of the descendants of the slaves, were subjects of a movement which has been called American social realism. This was influenced by French and Russian writing, and found an audience among the growing population.

A clear dichotomy between outward-turning and inward-turning writing, or between romantic and realist writers, is obviously an oversimplification: Henry James, for example, had been an early protagonist of 'realism', of writing about the familiar environment with strict regard to its actual properties, but by 1886 he had left to live in England and was writing in a very different way and meeting new influences. Henry Harland wrote novels about Jewish immigrants in New York, but later

* P. Rahv, *Image and Idea, Twenty Essays on Literary Themes*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1957, pp. 1–6.

emigrated to London and edited the *Yellow Book*, writing in the aesthetic manner. In the present century, William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* is a highly psychological work in the stream-of-consciousness style, but the author is also obsessed by the social conditions of the southern states, by the racial conflicts and by their evil history and consequences. Any attempt to link American writing with the concept of world vision attached to a social class in the Goldmann sense is difficult: the class identifications of the writers are confused with immigrant loyalties. During the 1950s, McCarthyism dispersed the growing Marxist interest and was a factor impeding the development of a socialist movement.

The twentieth century has seen a remarkable output in American writing. This is a fertile field for sociological analysis: only a very brief indication of the field is possible here. The poets include Vachel Lindsay, Robert Frost, Ezra Pound, Theodore Roethke, E. E. Cummings, Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and a generation of modern poets influenced by beat and hip culture, such as Robert Creeley and Kenneth Patchen. But Leslie Fiedler* writes:

> The old order is basically unchanged; the colleges brim full and overflow; the curriculum is expanded to include Burroughs and Kerouac; what was shuddered at yesterday is today anthologized and assigned . . . our basic consciousness remains unaltered though new kicks have been added to old, marihuana to martinis, mescalin to bourbon on the rocks.

Novelists range from Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, and Scott Fitzgerald at the beginning of the century, through Hemingway, Dos Passos, Steinbeck, and Faulkner in the middle years, to Salinger, Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, and John Updike today. Dramatists include Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Edward Albee – the theatre after a late start has enjoyed a remarkable vitality since the First World War, with New York as the main centre. The considerable body of literary criticism, which includes Leslie Fiedler and Harry Levine, has benefited from the work of European immigrants such as Erich Auerbach and René Wellek. There is a growing public for works on sociology and psycho-

* Leslie Fiedler, *Waiting for the End*, the American literary scene from Hemingway to Baldwin, London, Penguin Books, 1967, p. 172.

analysis: Theodore Reich and Herbert Marcuse have become best sellers.

The American book trade was once referred to as a 'tragedy' played out between the publisher, who sits upon mountains of books, and the man in the giant country who would gladly buy them.* This is because the number of retail bookshops is still so small: the distribution network consists of only 1,400 bookshops, the same number as in the much smaller West Germany. In fact, the 2,500 American publishers offer the book-buying public of approximately 10,000,000 people the surprisingly high figure of around 30,000 titles a year, averaging at seven titles bought per head a year. These books are bought by mail order, libraries, institutions of education, and include an enormous sale of paperbacks available outside bookshops. Paperbacks enable publishers to offer large advances to authors: such as $500,000 for Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and $350,000 for Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*. Paperbacks also now contract with authors for original publications, bringing out, for example, Norman Mailer's *American Dream* in paperback simultaneously with a hardback publication. So the financial situation for the American writer can show an improvement, that is if the writer can find a paperback publisher to back him.† This has been a relevant factor in the upward trend of novel publication in the States and may have been conducive to the diverse quality of fiction which obtains publication.

The teeming cities, the climate of violence at home and abroad, prolonged college life, the Negro activist movement – these are only some of the factors in a total context of social inequality and competition which have produced tension in American society. This ethos seems to be productive of attempts at self-expression and at an articulation of the social environment, in however debased or fragmented a form. At the apex of this pyramid of expressive activity stand those who can transcend the din and confusion of modern American life while retaining sufficient self-awareness and objectivity to translate this tension into works of literary merit. We ourselves are too

* L. Shatzkin, quoted by F. Raddatz, 'The Future of International Publishing', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 25 September 1969.
† Joseph Heller found difficulty in finding a publisher for *Catch-22*, subsequently a best seller.

close to these works to judge their quality with impunity, but a sociological study of their genesis can help us understand some of their meanings and something of the society from which they have sprung.